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THE KINGFISHER

PHYLLIS BOTTOME

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BY

PHYLLIS BOTTOME

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CHAPTER I

JIM was not sure when it first dawned on him that there was such a thing as security. When he did realise it he supposed it to be like one of those things, procurable for others, but unprocurable for him, which were marked at a shilling in the shop windows.

He had never known bodily safety except for the first few weeks of his life, when his mother by a species of enlightened tact threatened to come to pieces altogether and was retained by a reluctant matron in the hospital beyond her allotted time. When they returned home they promptly resumed the cup-and-ball existence produced by Tom Barton's intemperance.

Tom Barton was quite good-tempered when he was sober, and he was rarely drunk except during the week-ends, but from Friday to Monday the house rose and fell in the tempest of his intoxication. He was a good workman, and their income see-sawed between affluence and penury.

Nothing was more normal to Jim than the appearance and disappearance of the furniture. Wash-stands floated in and out of rooms, sofas precariously furnished shelters for games, and then, like Rachel's children, were not. Mantelpieces held clocks, china dogs and thrilling blue-beaded mats, and at a turn of the wrist—nothing but the bread-knife.

Hazily, like a far-off dream, a mute piano broke over his baby consciousness, and as swiftly and irrevocably vanished.

''E's drunk it,' was the explanation presented to Jim by a sympathetic neighbour.

As regular, and more noticeable than the migratory flight of tables and chairs, were the kicks and bruises which descended upon the human portions of the family.

Only Mrs. Barton was at all permanently bruised. Tom never hit the children unless they came in his way. When he was mad with drink he frequently expressed a wish to kill them, but beating his wife always did instead.

There was no convenient substitute for Mrs. Barton. Every now and then she screamed till the police came, which was very exciting for the children, but ordinarily she was very quiet, and then the interest of these occasions palled.

Mrs. Barton had had a great deal of spirit as a girl, and it lasted her nicely till she became a mother; then she alternated between melancholy and exasperation.

She meant to be kind to her children, and she always loved them, but the methods of her affection became as frayed as her nerves.

She kept them tolerably clean, and fed them as well as she could. She called them in at night and hit them perfunctorily and without spitefulness when they cried.

She was not an ideal mother but she had the maternal instinct.

Family life as far as Jim was concerned vacillated between tears and curses, and as soon as he was capable of choice he threw his weight upon the side of curses.

He cried when he had to, but he became conscious in himself of formidable gusts of ferocity which were as exciting as a game; they intimidated his equals and even at times his physical superiors.

He had all the habits of a badly teased stable kitten; whenever he was approached he prepared to strike, for almost as soon as he had learned anything he had learned that the only successful attitude of defence is attack.

His sister Eliza was easily quelled by him, though she was five years his elder. Her long hair put her out of court. Jim had only to wind his little hand in it and pull. Bert, his younger brother, cringed at the sight of him. Even his mother did not hit Jim after he was five years old and had gone for her with a knife.

Awful tussles took place between Jim and his father, and though they naturally ended in the complete victory of Mr. Barton they left his parent as a rule rather breathless and severely bitten.

Tom, unless he was drunk—when he feared nothing—had a secret dread of his baby Jim's blue eyes; they had a way of looking blazing mad like a tortured animal's and the child did not seem to know that when you are beaten, you really are beaten.

Jim's idea was that when you could retaliate no more you waited till exhausted nature re-equipped you—and then you burst out afresh.

He had no respect for a parent's 'that's enough,' and seemed incapable of recognising any finality but his own.

Something within him, very violent and unbreakable, never felt itself quelled. Jim did not know it was his spirit, because neither the word nor the thing was recognised in his circle.

Nothing was ever explained to him about anything.

He took blows, food, and curses from the same source; only he learned to dodge the blows and if possible steal the food; the curses were neither here nor there, except that they were sometimes useful as premonitory symptoms. He could often guess from the tone in which they were screamed whether there was a blow or bread and jam behind their easy utterance.

Jim's mother loved him, but Jim did not know she loved him; he knew only that he could reckon upon her, as far as he could reckon on anything, to supply certain of his wants.

He hated his father, but he did not know that that hot, menaced feeling, which sprang into his heart when he saw his father appear, was hate. He only knew that he did not ever wish to see his father.

Toward the rest of the world Jim felt, and exhibited a wary indifference.

Some children in the neighborhood seemed to be cleaner than the little Bartons, and had more food, but Jim did not like them any better for that. Occasionally children of another class altogether appeared in the street—strange visions of smiling faces and smart apparel, safeguarded by nurses, loomed sickeningly upon Jim's sight. They could not be stoned nor rolled in the gutter. Something mysterious but formidable, called 'law,' was behind them.

Jim cast surly and incredulous glances at them. Later on he attached to their infrequent appearances phrases caught

up from the steps of public-houses, expressive of derision and tinctured with envy.

But Jim himself was not envious of the rich. He preferred the tested violence of his dirty fists and well-developed muscles.

They might, these denizens of the upper air, have force behind them—but it was easy to see that they had no force in them. They were more vulnerable than Eliza. Jim knew that he could quickly reduce them below fighting level if he were given the chance.

He himself, even with both eyes blacked and the wind completely knocked out of him by a forcible descent of a flight of stairs, had never reached the abyss at which the fighting instinct stopped.

If his father couldn't down him nobody could. Deep in his hard and stubborn heart he nursed the feeling that the rich were soft.

Swanhill was a small town, or a big slum, whichever way you chose to look at it, set between two larger towns in a factory district. Four miles behind it lay the green, unvisited country, and in front of it were the river and the factories. Eighty chimneys soared, with a sodden incapacity for grace, into a smudge of sky. They seemed to be fumbling in their own smoke for a way out into the open air, but they never found it.

The town had six long, grimy streets filled with newspaper, orange-peel, smoke, small and overcrowded cottages, and the flashing windows of gigantic public houses. A handsome stone church perched ineffectually upon the hillside.

The population of Swanhill was seven thousand. Three hundred of it went to church. Fourteen belonged to the Salvation Army; there were fifty Catholics, and perhaps another fifty intermittently visited two nondescript chapels. This was the little leaven, and it did nothing whatever to interfere with the whole lump.

Jim had no preference for any particular scenery; but he liked the river, where he could get wet always, and in the summer very nearly drowned. He did not know what anything looked like, nor that anything else could look any different.

Eliza taught him something about school. She had to be clean for it, and in time, sooner or later you had to give in to the

teachers, though you could with impunity take it out of the other children at stated intervals in a yard.

She did not tell Jim what she had learned in school because she made a habit of relaxing her attention the instant the cane receded. Nothing remained in Eliza's mind after lesson hours but a little empty clamour and a few meaningless phrases.

She was not an easy child to teach because all the powers of her nature—and Eliza was by no means deficient in power—were concentrated upon inattention. She carried blankness of mind to a fine art.

Eliza's treasures were in the street, and that was where her heart was. She cared only for accidents, funerals and the arrival of babies, and upon none of these stimulating realities did her teachers touch.

Lessons seemed to Eliza's active and mature mind to be twaddle from an underworld.

She sat in school because she had to, and she was never one to waste her kicks upon the inevitable. When she thought that she could evade compulsion, Eliza was swift to evade it, but if she saw that compulsion had a longer reach, she gave in to it immediately.

Nor did Eliza mind giving in to compulsion as Jim did because she had a practical nature and she saw that it was no use minding. She was not an idealist. When she fought it was for a tangible object like an apple. An apple was worth a certain amount of physical inconvenience to Eliza; a principle was not. And as to fighting for the vanity of the thing in order to discover which was the stronger, Eliza gave to these inconclusive reckonings the derision which all good women keep for masculine triumphs.

When Jim had once beaten her, Eliza never fought him again, but she frequently circumvented him. Jim did not like Eliza, but he preferred her to any one else.

They often combined quite successfully against the dangers of the open road or the exigencies of family life, which were rather more dangerous than the road.

Jim did not start school until he was five years old, and for the first year or two he agreed perfectly with the standpoint of Eliza.

School was one more thing that happened, like drunkenness or bedtime. It fell upon the just and the unjust with the same continuous ineptitude.

School was duller than the street and sweeter than home. Sometimes you got something extra out of it, say another child's marbles; or a hymn-tune fell with an unexpected pleasantness upon the ear.

Once or twice a week a queer man dressed in black, with a habit of strange words and a voice incomprehensibly and dreamily low, with no zip in it, came in, and gave them all a lesson about a Person or People called God. The headmaster remained in the room with his cane inconspicuous but handy, so that you could not even yawn; but you did not have to listen, nor did God interfere with you in any other way. The creature in black seemed to think He would, but He didn't. A word called crucifixion slid off Jim's attention like water off a duck's back.

More interesting things leaped at him daily out of a Reader.

When Jim was nearly seven he suddenly found that cats, dogs and other odd combinations of letters could be mastered. He actually saw them for himself as they were in books, and he began to like these odd gymnastics of the intellect.

School ceased to be an unbroken restless blank punctuated by the blows of an exasperated grown-up.

He felt the dawn of a creative spirit; he could make words come right by himself. Figures spun themselves alive for him, and he began to grasp incredulously that geography was about the real earth.

History never seemed very sensible to him, though he liked to hear, of course, about the fighting. The causes seemed inadequate, for who cared about kings? But it was nice to think that almost everybody fought about something from the beginning of the world, and would probably go on fighting about it until the end.

Jim lost the sense of outwitting his teachers by complete absence of mind. All kinds of strange, responsive things rose up in him, questions hammered at his hard little head all day long.

He began to doubt if everybody had to be hit so much;

he read about extraordinary outbreaks of kindness. He even experienced one of them. Another boy gave him a humming top which he thought—mistakenly, as it happened—had ceased to hum. When the other boy found that Jim's superior manipulation had brought back its powers, he naturally tried to repossess himself of the top, but he was easily fought into acquiescence.

The other boy's name was Erb Badger, and the humming top cemented the first real affection of Jim's life.

It stirred all the generosity of his youth. Jim became suddenly aware that you could at a pinch really like people, and a strange feeling began to dawn in him for his mother. She smiled at one of his copy-books with obvious pride, and it hurt him when his father took the smile off her face by a casual blow.

One summer evening behind a persevering lilac-bush choked in smuts, Jim astounded Eliza by asking her if she had ever liked anybody.

Jim was nine years old at the time, and Eliza was a well-grown girl of fourteen.

She looked at him with wary, unflinching eyes—that had rather the effect of highly polished black buttons—then she said—

'Garn, y'ere soft!'

But Jim wasn't really soft. He hit Eliza severely and without compunction till she was forced to say, 'Give over!'

Then he gave over, but he still wondered if it wasn't possible to like somebody without being soft.

CHAPTER II

NOBODY ever answered Jim's questions. They rose rank upon serried rank, behind the barrier of his fists.

He had two worlds to dwell in; the world of the streets, swift, violent and public, which he thoroughly understood and took his part in without effort; and the world within his opening mind, intensely private, confused and tentative.

There were no connecting links and he was precipitated from one to the other without conscious volition. Jim's complications were not shared by Eliza.

Eliza did not care how the earth was made or why we got here.

She knew that she had not received all she wanted, but that some of it could be acquired by strategy. The only problem that gave her any serious intellectual misgiving was how to obtain feather boas and jewellery while remaining within the law. Sometimes, in her more imaginative moments, she wondered what would happen if she went beyond it.

Tom Barton knocked his son down for asking him why he wanted to get drunk.

It was not a filial question, nor was Mr. Barton's an analytical mind.

He did not know that he got drunk from a variety of reasons. The size and frequency of public-houses; the extreme dryness of his throat from working in chalk; the lack of horizon beyond Saturday night; and the fine feeling which intoxication gave him of a temporary mastery over mind and matter, supplied a certain authority for these aberrations.

Besides, there was nothing to stop him getting drunk.

Jim's questions were taken more kindly by his mother. She told him repeatedly to 'get along,' but her tone was one of admiration, and he often found her eyes resting on him with more alertness than her sunken gaze usually held, as if—like that Mother of old—she was pondering his questions in her heart.

There was no one outside the family circle to whom Jim could appeal. The Grove in which the Bartons lived was divided from any intercourse with Dives by an impassable gulf. The Grove did not know what was on the other side of the gulf. Nor apparently did Dives.

There was the church, of course, but though the Grove had no antagonism to the church none of its inhabitants ever went inside it except automatically shortly after a birth, if the birth was respectable—it was considered bad form to baptize illegitimate children—and after a death as reluctantly as the law allowed.

The teachers in the school looked on education as the insertion of a series of facts; they wished to lift a lid and press all that they could into an empty receptacle, and they resented in Jim's mind the presence of anything they had not put there.

Perhaps Jim might have given up the search for wider knowledge as useless if he had been the type of character which can give anything up. But the quality behind his fists which made him unbeatable in physical combat gave him also a queer, blind power of continuing any losing game, and those who continue losing games long enough may win them. Accident or fate, or some sublime intent, plays into their hands. But there is no convention about such visitants; they seldom appear in an appropriate guise.

Miss Masters came to call at Number 8, the Grove. There was a new vicar at the church, and Miss Masters, who lived out of the smoke two miles away, was a fresh ecclesiastical broom. She had not done much sweeping for the former vicar, a toothless scholar who took his services and left people alone; but this younger and most energetic Christian had rallied round him several good women who realised the presence of opportunity and had not too much to do at home.

Jim was lying in a corner of the kitchen when he heard a doubtful knocking at the door. He knew it was not a neighbour, for his neighbours had no doubts; nor was it a rate-collector, for rate-collectors thunder.

Mrs. Barton opened the door cautiously and explained to a confused and flushed young lady, anxious to make a good

impression, and not catch anything, that Jim had merely been trod on by a horse.

The young lady came in and sat down on the edge of a chair. She smiled without ease, and Mrs. Barton, who had been washing and was in the middle of mangling, stood fingering the kitchen table. Jim had never seen a lady so near before. He didn't think the teachers at the school were really ladies; he could understand their voices, and they hadn't very bright patent-leather shoes.

'I don't know whether you know,' said Miss Masters impressively, 'that the Rev. Arthur Atkinson has just come to this parish?'

Mrs. Barton saw that something was expected of her, so she said, 'Really now?' and hoped she wasn't going to be asked to pay a penny for a magazine which she didn't want, like some one in the next parish. Their late vicar had been restfully uninterested in the spread of light religious literature.

'Yes,' said Miss Masters cheerfully, 'and he's given me the Grove!'

Mrs. Barton stared hard at this dubious piece of clerical generosity.

She did not wish to look a gift-horse in the mouth, but what had this poor young woman in front of her, in her very well-tailored blue-serge suit, done, to be saddled with the Grove? In her mind's eye Mrs. Barton saw the Grove as it was between eight and nine o'clock of a Saturday night. She had herself been trailed, screaming, from end to end of it several times.

She recalled the Grove speaking its mind in its Sunday leisure; and if she had been capable of as much thought as her son, who was listening with all his ears, she would have wondered at the curiously different angles from which two people may see the same object.

'To visit, you know,' went on Miss Masters more brightly still. 'He thinks we all ought to make friends with each other.'

'I dessay 'e's young,' interrupted Mrs. Barton sympathetically. ''E'll get over all that."

Jim drew a deep breath—he wished this visitor would not clip her words and lower her voice at the end of her sentences. She was saying things which ought to be carefully followed.

'He told me to be sure and look you up,' went on Miss Masters. 'He has heard all about you.'

Jim was not surprised to see that his mother was annoyed. 'To hear all about a person' in the Grove meant to hear a great deal to their disadvantage.

Mrs. Barton stiffened with sudden ferocity.

''Oo ever said anything about me,' she said sharply, 'lied—and that's all there is to it! There ain't nothink no one *can* say! I take what lodgers the law allows, and I 'ave my marriage lines in the tea-caddy.'

'Oh, nothing against you,' cried Miss Masters hurriedly. 'Quite the contrary! It was the police, you know, told Mr. Atkinson about your husband—Saturday nights, and all you have to suffer——'

She looked vaguely at Jim, who returned her gaze with a fascinated, impenetrable stare.

'I'm afraid you are not very happy, Mrs. Barton?'

Mrs. Barton licked her dry lips and then looked down at her black and broken finger-nails. She felt resentful. She didn't see that the clergy had any call to talk over Mr. Barton with the police; nor did she see what Saturday nights, and their sometimes too public history, had to do with this neat coat and skirt in front of her.

Mrs. Barton was hot and choleric with the family wash, and she had been brought up rather short by the irrelevant word 'happy'—but she smothered her feelings politely and spoke tolerantly after a moment's pause.

'Oh, well,' she said, 'I suppose we must all take the rough with the smooth, mustn't we?'

She did not add that the proportions are sometimes strangely different.

Jim's mind leaped upon the charm of this new word 'happy.' Of course he had heard it before, but the sense was new; he had never heard it applied to his mother.

Why should she be happy? She hadn't been to a circus. Did people like this lady go normally to such quantities of circuses that they were always happy? What did his mother mean by taking the rough with the smooth?

Probably she didn't mean anything; she had only spoken with the deep-seated courtesy of the poor, desiring to relieve

any discomfort caused by too sharp a contrast between her life and that of her visitor's. Grown-up people often said things like that they didn't mean—but Jim never did. What he said he meant, and he always expected the same radical and abnormal sincerity from others.

'I really came to speak to you about your difficulties,' Miss Masters began again; 'but oughtn't we to go into another room?'

She looked significantly at Jim, who scowled horribly at this possible deprivation of experience; but he was relieved when he remembered that their only other room was the scullery, which must be more or less under water from the wash.

'Oh, 'e don't matter,' said his mother easily. 'Yer can't keep 'em out of it, and 'e's going on for ten, Jim is.'

'Mr. Atkinson thinks,' Miss Masters said in a low, embarrassed voice, 'and so do I, that your life as it is now must be very brutalising. We quite understand how hard the question is for you, and we deeply sympathise with you. The very idea of breaking the sacredness of the marriage tie is awful; but these weekly scenes, before the children, too, and the actual danger to your own life. Ought you not to think of leaving your husband, Mrs. Barton?'

Mrs. Barton stared at her. She was bewildered by the innocence of her visitor's question; also the word 'sacred' and the phrase 'marriage tie' were not easily comprehensible to her. Some people might be married like that, of course, but these were not her difficulties.

'What would I do,' she asked doubtfully, 'with the children? They 'ave to be fed. There's Eliza, now, out of work again—I don't know what's ter become of that gel. Seems as if I couldn't get her in, off the streets, try as I may—and 'er father's 'and's so 'eavy. I don't seem ter hardly like to ask 'im to beat 'er.

'An' Jim, 'e's at school still—and Bert—'e's too young to go yet, and the baby not weaned nor won't be while I 'ave anythink for 'im with the price of milk what it is. Yer can't leave babies ter work out, and there's so few places hereabouts anyhow ter work in—and Tom 'e'd take up with another woman. That's what 'e'd do. A man 'as ter 'ave some one,

if it's only to shy things at. I shouldn't get a penny out of 'im again, not once I left 'im.'

Miss Masters looked shocked. She had naturally not regarded the question quite in this light; she had meant to be strictly practical, and she had actually gone to the Free Library and looked up the Separation Laws.

But she had expected questions of the heart to predominate —memory, affection, romance—that was one of the reasons why she had offered to undertake the interview. She had murmured to Mr. Atkinson that only a woman could understand another woman's heart; but she found it a little difficult to follow Mrs. Barton's.

'You could take a room, couldn't you,' she suggested, 'with the children, and I think after a fortnight the court would bring a maintenance order against your husband?'

' 'Oo's ter let me 'ave a room for nothing for a fortnight?' demanded Mrs. Barton. 'And 'ow's the law going to tackle Tom when 'e won't have no money, 'E'll drink it up, or move on somewheres where 'e can't be 'ad. Once yer 'ooked, yer 'ooked, as far as I can see; and now, if you'll excuse me, miss, I must get back to my mangle.'

Mrs. Barton smoothed her rough hand along the top of her working apron. She hesitated before she left the room. She could not believe that there was no help or wisdom in so well-dressed a visitor.

She looked wistfully at the flushed face and confused eyes of Miss Masters; but nothing came from them. Miss Masters wanted to get away too, but she hadn't got a mangle.

She asked instead, if she mighn't stay for a few minutes with the poor little boy. She was so fond of children. Mrs. Barton nodded and slipped into the scullery.

In another fortnight she must go into the hospital. Frequent kickings had put something wrong inside her. It was very painful and would have to be taken out.

She would like to have talked to her visitor about it, but after all she hadn't liked to bother her. She was unmarried and there were details—quite familiar to Jim—which would perhaps be out of place presented to a mind so ignorant of the basic laws of marriage. You could not be too careful with ladies.

'Leave my 'usband!' said Mrs. Barton grimly to herself. 'A pretty fool I should look leavin' a 'usband! Me with four children to keep, and 'alf of me inside ter be took out!"

Miss Masters, left alone with a fierce-eyed, tow-headed and perfectly silent urchin in the corner, wondered if after all she was very fond of children, and longed to take the nearest tram home to a quiet tea. Jim's blue eyes held her; it was the crisis of his life. He could not speak, but his mind seethed with questions.

'Was it really a horse that kicked you?' Miss Masters asked ingratiatingly. 'Do tell me about it.'

'Yus—'e trod on me,' said Jim automatically.

He did not see how he could tell her anything more about it than that. Out of all his seething questions he drew one hurriedly and flung it at her.

'Are you 'appy?' he asked with fierce intensity.

The suddenness of this question took Miss Masters' breath away—but she agreed after a moment's pause that she was. She had a disagreeable mother, three sisters prettier than herself, and much too small a dress allowance. Still, she shuffled out of these disadvantages and claimed her birthright.

'Oh, yes,' she said smiling, 'perfectly happy. Aren't you?'

'I dunno,' said Jim doubtfully; 'not if I know what 'appy is. I were once; I looked at a circus through a 'ole in the tent.'

Miss Masters let this opening into bliss slide past her. She was rather a perfunctory young woman, and she preferred the surface of things. She asked Jim's name and if he was fond of reading. He said with another flash of conviction—

'Gord, I sh'ud think I was——'

It occurred to Miss Masters to wind up this interview successfully by an offer to lend Jim books. One always felt more comfortable after one had really *done* something for the poor. The sudden light in his face clinched the matter.

Miss Masters remembered about the books. Unconsciously she became the cornerstone of Jim's life, and though she was at the time thinking much more seriously about tennis, she kept his soul alive.

In a few months' time Jim's stubborn, insistent little figure was given the run of the Masters' library—they were well-to-do middle-class people who had to have some books.

Miss Masters rejoicing in her conquest of a boy famed for being the worst in the district, lent him a summer-house full of earwigs to read in. Jim dared not take the books home, for his father would have pawned them—or even his mother, if she hadn't cash enough for a meal. In the winter they let him have hay in the summer house and an old blanket.

He tore the heart out of their books, but he never became intimate with the Masters. The said, 'Hullo' when he appeared, and patted him on the shoulder, and Jim watched speculatively their family manners. He even mimicked in private their clipped accents. They said—

'Oo do yer do? Haow gled I *em* to see you.'

But he never really liked them.

He went once or twice to church as an experiment, but he soon gave it up. He was bored by the cryptic and unintelligent prayers. He preferred to listen to hymn-tunes outside the door if it wasn't too cold, and though the Rev. Arthur Atkinson was a good man he was no preacher.

He took, however, a special interest in Jim, and often when he gave those queer lessons about bunches of Divinity, at school, he would single out Jim for appreciative and casual talk. His interest in Jim became infectious, the head-master caught it. Some—a very few—of Jim's questions got answered. There was talk of secondary education, and even, if this succeeded, of the university.

Jim's mind soared steadily on toward undreamed-of goals. The future appeared for him so wide that he might have fallen through it quite comfortably and never been anything but a nice young man if it hadn't been for an accident—quite a normal accident except in its consequences—which took place in a minute and changed everything.

CHAPTER III

MRS. BARTON, whose admiration for her eldest son had become the one light in a drab existence, was herself the innocent cause of its total eclipse.

She was getting tea ready when the accident happened. They were all there except Mr. Barton. The baby, scarlet in the face with nettle-rash and bad temper, had been soothed into temporary calm by the illegitimate use of a dummy.

Bert was contentedly sucking the paint off a toy horse under the table. Most of it was already worn off by the friction of his constant tongue, but there was still a streak of vermilion on its tail. Eliza was making eyes and faces of no uncertain meaning at the grocer's boy over the way. It was that black day of the week known as a half-holiday.

The March wind ran dryly to and fro in the Grove, carrying a harvest of scraps of newspaper, rags, and orange-peel.

Mr. Barton had started home in an irritated mood. He was not a sentimental parent, but what feeling he had was centred upon his children—he never drank more than half his earnings out of consideration for their welfare; and he always regarded them with that resentful affection common to people who have made great sacrifices for an unworthy cause.

If he had a favorite, it was Eliza. There was something about the metallic glean of Eliza's roving eyes which appealed to her father. It was the eye of one who sooner or later 'got there.' She did not ask doubtful questions nor expect impossible virtues as her brother Jim did.

Mr. Barton had never done Eliza any harm—for she was an expert at dodging blows—and yet he had never had to go out of his way to do her any good. It was a soothing relationship. So it was most unfortunate—on a Saturday afternoon—that one of his mates should have chosen to give him some very drastic hints upon the character of his daughter.

Mr. Barton made up his mind to beat his favourite child, and drank a good deal of rather bad beer to get his spirit up.

No one should say he was a parent complacent of his daughter's shame. Not that Eliza had any shame, but if half what his mate suggested was true she would be a good candidate for it. He would beat Eliza first to show her what was what—and then he would beat his wife, because after all, being the child's mother, she was directly responsible for her morals.

The moment he pushed the door open his whole family knew that there would be what was popularly known in the Grove as 'trouble.'

There were kippers for tea, but no one could taste a kipper until the trouble was over.

Bert began to cry and flattened himself against the wall. The children looked like a covey of flustered partridges, prepared to shoot out into space at a moment's notice.

Mrs. Barton put her hand up to her head and then let it fall again, realising that it was not likely to be of more use to her there than anywhere else.

Mr. Barton's legs were fairly steady, but his thoughts were uncertain. He pronounced one word in the direction of Eliza. It was an explanatory word, and Eliza poised under it with an eye on the scullery door.

But Mr. Barton's attention focused more readily upon his wife. He approached her to ratify his sentence upon Eliza with a blow. He knew that Mrs. Barton would not spring to avoid it as Eliza would. She had no spring left in her.

Jim had been watching his father steadily in order to effect his own escape if necessary, when something suddenly went queer before his eyes—it was as if a thin, protecting screen were withdrawn between him and his own emotions. He saw his mother's face in a mist—very white and sick with anticipation, he heard her say, 'Ah, don't Tom——' and all desire for personal escape went out of him. He sprang suddenly forward and struck at his father's head with Bert's toy horse.

Mr. Barton swayed back with astonishment, but before he had recovered from it Jim struck again. This time he had a better weapon, for Eliza, with a woman's readiness of

wit and hand, had thrust the poker toward him. Jim dropped the toy horse and struck savagely with the poker.

The blow caught Mr. Barton so that he spun once like a very heavy, silent top, and then sank in a heap on the floor. Jim struck at him again and again; he was in a panic now—a panic of accumulated rage; and all the terror of the household was behind his lifted arm. If his father got up again not one of them would escape.

But Mr. Barton made no attempt to get up again. He lay there quietly in a pool of his own blood. Then he shuddered once or twice as if something had to be shaken off—shook it off and lay quite still.

Jim was not sure what had happened, but the heap on the floor did not look like his father any more. It looked like a bundle of old clothes which ought to be cleared away.

There was nothing terrible or powerful in it, and yet there was something very terrible and powerful in the room, which seemed to take up all the air.

Mrs. Barton sat there, looking at the heap with her mouth open and her eyes curiously fixed.

Eliza screamed readily and dramatically till the neighbours rushed in. Some one sent for the police, and when they came Eliza pointed an accusatory finger at her brother, for she realised that the situation was exceptional and that in exceptional situations some one had better be accused.

The police lifted Mr. Barton up, and Mrs. Barton screamed—a curious, flat scream, not at all like the full-dress successes of Eliza. She was still screaming, with no meaning at all behind her voice when the police took Jim away. He was a very small criminal, and they were not at all unkind to him. When he told them he was fourteen years old one of them said in a reassuring manner,—

'Well, sonny, you won't swing for it this time!'

The magistrate was more severe, and the court was a still, dreadful place where all the dust was tidy and as if kept there very carefully to make the benches look sad.

The magistrate finished by saying that the penitentiary would be just the place for Jim.

They put him in for three years with criminals of every sort and kind, and feeble-minded, whose crimes were only

blunders. Jim's questions faded for a time under his new destiny.

It was no use asking questions about such unreasonable things. Only he remembered his books, and there were pictures in his mind which blotted out the eternal whitewash of the walls.

He missed the life of the streets most. Life was still there under the massive dulness of the institution, but it ran subterraneously and without freedom, and some of it was very, very nasty.

Jim could not keep his hopes alive in it, but he kept his stubborn pictures. He could see the Miss Masters playing tennis in white drill skirts on a green lawn crying 'Forty love' to the curate, and the contents of his book, tropical lands under curious skies with birds flying, knights in armour who were brave and kind; and there was always at the back of his mind that unfinished picture of his father lying in a dishevelled heap on the floor and not getting up again.

Jim had meant to be a schoolmaster, and he went on with his education in the penitentiary. Mr. Atkinson had spoken for him to the magistrate and so had the head-master. They had called him promising.

Common or bad language, Jim knew already, but now he learned the vivid phraseology of thieves.

What carefully brought-up people call vice and get excited over, Jim knew as unreflectively as he knew rancid butter. He got used to both these things, but he never took any interest in them.

He was beaten sometimes very hard and quite justly by the authorities.

He fought his way from the first into perfect security from the other boys. Nobody could do him any more harm than he could them, and he had the splendid reputation of a murderer to back him. He was not underfed, and he had a healthier and more open-air physical life than he had ever known.

His only starvation was of the spirit, and all his growing senses starved in company with his soul. He was approaching the age of beauty, and no one ever spoke or thought of

beauty, nor was the penitentiary furnished with any single object framed for that purpose.

After two years his mother died. Eliza disappeared, and Bert and the baby were swallowed up by excellent orphanages.

These facts were communicated to Jim quite kindly by the master of the penitentiary himself, in a parlour which smelled musty, and was used only for visitors or the breaking of calamities. He was given a black crepe band and the addresses of the orphanages.

Jim was sixteen when his family disappeared. He had killed his father, which never gave him any particular regret; but the complete wiping out of his domestic circle was a more unsatisfactory business. They had not been a particularly nice family, but they were all he had.

Jim felt as if certain starved roots which bound him to the earth had suddenly been cut. All his memories rushed up on him and haunted him with loneliness.

He did not cry, but he kept tucked away in the corner of his retentive brain the addresses of the orphanages.

Eliza had probably landed on her feet; but he often wondered where this attitude had placed her. He would have looked her up if she had been in his place and he in hers, but he did not expect this weakness from Eliza.

Jim had received quite a lot of religious instruction by now, so that when he said—and he was obliged to say it at least twice a day—'Our Father Which art in Heaven,' he knew he was referring to a possible old gentleman who in some unknown and rather large place might or might not keep an eye on him. This was God. He did not seem very get-at-able, and most of the boys in the penitentiary took the view that He was invented. You could not have bad language without a Deity, but you could have everything else.

Jim, however, was not a positive atheist. For one thing, he had read more than any one, even the penitentiary schoolmaster, so that he knew the whole idea was not in the nature of a scholastic invention on purpose to cause friction—which was the accepted view of his new companions. There was more to it than that. Some one, when you came to think of it, was probably behind something—but you couldn't quite tell what.

The sky, the clouds, the stars, the common grasses of the distant fields, the blue spread vision of the sea, and the swift, interminable flow of water between river banks—could these things happen by accident?

They were like creatures—were they not created? And if they were created, was there not a Creator? What would happen if you fell into the sky? (Jim received a bad mark for this irrelevant question.)

What did happen to people when you hit them too hard with a poker? They were there just before—what became of them afterward?

Their bodies were dead, of course; but they weren't dead, were they? They'd gone as if they passed through their bodies, as people at a railway station slip in and out of trains.

Where did they go? The chaplain was quite nice; he did not punish Jim for asking this question. He said, 'Heaven or hell' without a moment's hesitation. But he preferred talking about cricket.

Apparently Heaven and hell hadn't much meaning except when you used them with the direct intention of being bad. What was it that meant inside people to be good or bad? Something meant inside Jim—something as fierce as his fighting instinct and as plain as a pair of compasses. It was always going about its business, meaning something, and it very seldom meant to be bad.

This something in Jim did not shrink from badness as weak boys did, with tears; it looked steadily at it and resented it. It pushed him toward friendy relations with all his world—often quite uselessly, because all he had learned and read made his companions hostile to him. It pushed him forward through his work, and never rested in him till he had done his best.

He heard the master say once of him, to a member of a committee, 'That boy over there has got character——' but he did not know what character meant. He knew only that somebody had put something inside him which belonged to him and was never satisfied.

He was not consciously unhappy; he associated unhappiness only with physical mischance. Yet there was one spot

in his mind vulnerable to pain, and over which he always hurried.

It was not his crime; he acknowledged that simply as a blunder—and on the whole it was a successful blunder. But it hurt him to think of his mother. She had been to see him twice since he had been in the penitentiary, and each time she had brought him things to eat and had cried over him, and before she went she had had said between her tears,—

'Gord—they needn't have took you away from me.'

Now she was dead and couldn't come any more, so there was, of course, no use bothering about it.

But the sore place in Jim's mind remained. It was the nearest point he reached toward that broken image of the mind of God—human love.

CHAPTER IV

THE Rev. Arthur Atkinson never got on in the Church of England. He took his profession too seriously, and often acted without forethought, by the Gospels.

When Miss Masters said to him,—

'Isn't it too awful about Jim Barton? After all we've done for him, to murder his own father? It almost makes you lose your faith in human nature, doesn't it?'

She caught for a moment in her vicar's eye that dangerous look, so rarely seen, of the consistent Christian.

Miss Masters was a practical woman and she gave up from that hour the thought of Arthur Atkinson as a husband.

He said a little crisply, 'Something will have to be done for Jim, certainly,' and she saw that it was going to be far too much.

Arthur Atkinson went to see Jim twice in the penitentiary, but he found the crust of suspicion and contrast between them too heavy to break through.

Jim only looked at his boots, swallowed nervously and lied. Arthur might have got at the boy by breaking down his defences, but he was not the type of man who could take liberties even with a child's defences. He looked wistfully at the wall of Jim's frightened pride and left him alone.

'I can't,' he said to himself, 'do anything with him while he is in this place. If I make him human he will only suffer more. Better let him take the precaution of the deep-sea fishes who lose their eyes in the dark.'

Jim was quite unaware that he possessed a friend. He thought of his vicar as only 'another of Them'; and by Them he meant mysterious people who asked embarrassing questions, and out of whom nobody that he knew had ever got anything better than a prayer-book.

As Jim's term neared its end he grew nervous. He was only seventeen and had done so well at the penitentiary

school that the committee had decided to offer him two years more and a pupil teachership.

The master of the penitentiary told him that his future was secure. He might, if he worked long and hard enough, and stayed where he was, even become a schoolmaster. Very few penitentiary boys had ever won such a position.

It was so wonderful that it was almost incredible. How could Jim possibly refuse, and would he even be allowed to refuse? Dared he tell one of Them, that in his reprehensible heart he wanted to go on a barge?

He winced at the thought of their incredulity. What! A shiftless, useless life which only appealed to his ignorance, as the stage appeals to silly girls in their teens?

He shrank from expressing this dream, which, with bated breath, he allowed himself at times to dwell on.

A barge—water under him, the open sky—no rules!

What did it matter if it included occasional kicks and curses? The bottom of kicks and curses were easy to plumb—you got out of the way or you retaliated. You didn't stay under them; they were but irrelevant matter in the wrong place; they formed no atmosphere; they did not paralyse the heart and will.

If he was too poor to serve an apprenticeship and must therefore be content with never being anything better than a barge-boy at a pound a week, what did that matter when you had had nothing a week and a pound spelled indepêndence and a way of life? You could float forever on a barge with no walls hemming you in.

Jim lay awake all night wondering how he could best escape a noble career and sink into insignificance.

He could actually, if he liked, run away. Long ago he had worked out the whole problem. He had the nerve for it and he knew precisely how it could be done.

But once you had escaped there was the shadow of the police behind you. You would find that without money you would have to reappear, and reappearances are usually fatal.

You had to have friends or money to stay disappeared.

Jim had been told of a burglar who would help him—a very good burglar who had made him a sporting offer through a young pal in the same dormitory. His pal would, of course,

return to the burglar directly he got out, and he strongly advised Jim to enter the same profession.

Burglary is an intelligent, adventurous career. Still, there again you aren't really free. Something hangs over you which may, sooner or later, drop.

It would be better, even if it was less amusing, to take up some career which put the law off noticing you at all. Not to be noticed! That was what Jim longed for. Not to be tied to a whistle or a bell, but to go where you liked with no one to see or care where you were at the end of it! It was a fierce longing, and it held the whole of Jim's heart.

It would be quite impossible to explain it to the master. The master was considered a first-rate master, but he made a point of listening to no explanations but his own. He had a gift for epigram, and he often thought he had got to the bottom of a subject by expressing one of his own ideas.

The master was a good disciplinarian; he knew what was in the boys' pockets, but he never knew anything that was in their minds—the rules were what mattered, and he had force behind him. He did not care how his horses came to the water, for he knew that he could make them drink.

'Now if you give trouble,' he used to say in a sharp, jocular voice to the sullen newcomer, 'you'll have to take trouble—that's what it comes to here!'

He received Arthur Atkinson with that assumed respect which honest members of the clergy most shrink from.

Arthur Atkinson saw at a glance that Mr. Wickham accepted religion as a whipper-in.

'Ah, yes, sir,' the master said benignly, 'come to see the boy —Jim Barton? You were quite right about that boy, sir; I recollect your saying that he was an exceptionally intelligent lad—so he is, most unusual! My schoolmaster says he never has to tell him a thing twice. In fact his intelligence is so exceptional that we are prepared to keep him on permanently—on the staff, as it were.

'If that boy sticks to it and does his part of the business—why, by the time he's five-and-twenty he'll be an educated man earning perhaps two hundred a year! It's a wonderful outlook for the boy, sir—princely! That's what I said to him last night.

'"Barton," I said, 'you can move if you wish to, out of your class."

'I did indeed, sir; those were my very words.

'"This is a democratic country, Barton," I said. "In a sense—in a certain sense—as far as the penitentiary goes—you have the world before you. Of course there is the stigma"—I made a point of mentioning that to the boy; you must never let them get above themselves—"but here it would be at any rate *partially* overlooked."

'There have been no outbreaks on the part of the lad since we had him; none at all. I said to him the night he arrived. "Now, Barton, if you *give* trouble, you know you'll have to *take* trouble," and that was final.'

Arthur Atkinson nodded patiently. He was never much interested in anecdotal finalities.

'Do you know what the boy wants to do himself?' he asked.

The master stared at this irrelevant question. If it wasn't the clergy all over to go asking aimless questions of a busy man after everything had been quite clearly explained to them!

If he didn't guide this particular specimen with great care he might go and put ideas into the boy's head—then where would they be?

Mr. Wickham explained painstakingly and with great tact that a boy's best interests and what he wanted were totally different things. In order to fulfil the former you had to ignore the latter.

It didn't do to ask the boys what they wanted. The Rev. Arthur Atkinson, however, though he seemed quiet, was one of the obstinate kind. He waited for Mr. Wickham to finish speaking, and then he repeated,—

'Still, I should like to see the boy first and find out what he wants. His sentence is over, you see.'

The master shrugged his shoulders.

'Oh, quite so, sir, in a sense,' he said, 'but if you'll excuse my giving you a hint, I shouldn't harp upon that point. His plans are settled, and I assure you that short of what we offer him he'll have no chance at all. Not what you or I could call a chance.

'It's, if I may say so—to use a vulgar expression—neck or

nothing with the boy, sir, and he's remarkably lucky to have such a piece of neck offered him. He is, indeed, sir.'

Arthur Atkinson did not dispute the point. He was feeling extremely uncomfortable. There is nothing in the world so dangerous as to be a real liberal, and unfortunately, it is not dangerous to yourself alone.

If he was prepared to offer Jim any other chance he must be prepared to see him take any other risk; and it is not a reassuring state of things to propose risks to boys of seventeen who have been in a penitentiary for three years.

Nor did Jim look like a suitable subject for freedom. He stood at the door of the visitors' parlour in answer to his summons, reluctantly shuffling from one foot to the other and fingering his cap.

It was four o'clock on a June afternoon. The windows of the parlour were tight shut to keep the dust off a bright-blue tablecloth, and a fly buzzed unhappily across the dirty pane of glass, tantalisingly between it and the summer air. Jim was more silent than the fly, but he looked quite as desperately shut in.

'There's your kind friend, Mr. Atkinson,' said the master in a cheery voice, with rather a sharp glance at Jim's lowered eyelids.

He disliked a cowed look at moments when he had no intention of cowing.

'He's come to have a little chat with you about the future, and I've just been telling him your prospects. Rose-coloured, that's what I call them—rose-coloured. You can put your cap down.'

Jim put his cap down. The master shook hands cordially with Mr. Atkinson and said,—

'Well, sir, I'll see you again later.'

Then he withdrew after another still sharper glance at Jim.

Neither Mr. Atkinson nor Jim moved till the door shut.

Then Jim's furtive eyes raised themselves cautiously to the face before him. Usually people like Mr. Atkinson set all his wits flying by trying to put him at his ease.

But the man before him, stooping a little, thin, with

dreamy eyes and clear-cut sensitive mouth, was not thinking about anybody's ease. He held out his hand gravely.

At first Jim did not know what to do with it. He had not shaken anybody's hand for several years—but in the end he clutched nervously at it, dropped it, and as he was told to sit down, took the extreme edge of a chair, and returned defensively to the investigation of his square-toed boots. He was very unhappy and as nervous as a wild animal under human observation for the first time.

Mr. Atkinson was unhappy, too, but he knew better what to do with it.

'It's quite true,' he said slowly, 'I have been talking to the master about you, Jim. He's been telling me what he wants you to do, but what I want to know is—what do you want to do yourself?'

Jim's furtive eyes wandered all round the room and then fixed themselves suddenly with a glance of startling honesty upon his visitor's face.

'Do?' he asked breathlessly. 'Gord! I want ter get aht!'

He had put his case in a nutshell, and having said all he had to say he dropped his wild, speaking eyes and started trembling. Perhaps he had made a dreadful mistake. This man was only one of Them after all, and wouldn't want to help him. Perhaps the vicar was only asking questions, and had chanced to light upon the key question of Jim's heart by accident.

'You know what they offer you?' Mr. Atkinson continued quietly. 'You realise that it's a good job, better than you could get outside? It may be worth—before you are thirty—two hundred a year, and it's an educated profession.'

Jim's faint hope sank still more. But something in the unassuming, quiet voice tempted him to one more effort.

The man before him did not speak as if he was perfectly certain he was right and every other notion was absurd and wrong. He might be accessible to another point of view, however unreasonable it sounded. Jim flung the whole of his spirit into his last appeal.

'I 'ate it!' he muttered between shaking lips. 'I want ter get aht.'

The words fell startlingly into the dirty, conscious, respect-

able little room. They struck at a system, and they struck in vain.

But the man in front of Jim was not an advocate of systems. He said very quietly—

'Very well, then—I'll help you to get out.'

It was almost as if he himself had been caught in a trap and knew the frantic compulsion of its teeth upon the quivering spirit.

Jim raised his eyes to Arthur Atkinson's, and held them there for a long moment. He gave him in that one glance the scared-off, accumulated confidence of all his fighting years.

Youth launched him out upon a sea of faith, it gave him the generosity to trust, in spite of all experience, in a man of a different class. Jim had never trusted Miss Masters; he had profited by her. But he did not even ask himself what profit lay in the new feeling for the man before him. He gave him, without barriers, the freedom of his soul.

Arthur Atkinson returned his glance, but he was still more afraid. He looked deep into the confident, blue eyes fixed upon him and wondered if what he saw there was really the Call of the Wild.

It is a favourite phrase with those who have all their lives answered unconsciously the easier and more persistent Call of the Tame.

Was he confronted once more by a fugitive aspiration of youth—or was Jim an exception? Did he really want to get out?

Would he, if he was chained up a little longer, grow sleek and contented and be the first to shrink back in horror from the attacks of the open world?

'You're safe here, you know,' Arthur said gently. 'You won't be safe outside.'

'I'll be safe enough,' said Jim fiercely. 'It ain't no use being safer than you want to be.'

A gleam of answering fierceness came into the eyes of the man who had never got out.

'Have you thought at all,' he asked, 'what you want to do for a living? I suppose they've taught you some kind of trade haven't they?'

Jim's eyes became vigilantly expressionless again. It

seemed to him probably the moment to lie. Jim's nature was essentially truthful, but he could tell a lie at a pinch, and a pinch came when you saw the truth wouldn't be understood.

How could you explain a barge to a clergyman? You could not, when you came to think of it, explain a clergyman to a barge.

Arthur Atkinson saw the dangerous veil of class obstruction descending between him and the boy; he cleared it away with a quick gesture of appeal.

'I shan't mind,' he said hurriedly, 'what you want to do. Tell me anything you like. You see, if you don't tell me the truth I shall go and make a mistake, and if we're to be friends you can't afford my mistakes.'

Jim did not understand the last part of the sentence, but he saw that the pinch had been miraculously removed; as far as this man went there would be no more pinches.

He gave immediately the whole of his mind.

'I *could* be a burglar,' he explained, 'but I'd rather get on a barge—I don't want the law after me. I 'ave done a bit of carpentering, but they've kept me mostly at books. I don't want ter do—what they've kept me at.'

Arthur Atkinson let the burglar drop, but he had to let the books drop too, and he had counted on the books.

'All right,' he said, 'that's settled then—we'll try for a barge. I want you to come straight to me when you get out to-morrow. Will you?'

Jim nodded. He fumbled with the address given him by the vicar, read it, and put it carefully into his pocket.

'Do you think as 'ow,' he asked nervously, 'you *reelly* can get me orff?'

'You tell them you are coming to see me to-morrow,' explained Arthur Atkinson, 'and go on saying it—then I can manage. Don't sign anything, and here's your car fares.'

They exchanged a more successful grip of the hands, and parted.

It was not very easy for either of them to manage the getting out.

The master plainly told Arthur Atkinson that he was ruining the boy's splendid prospects for a mare's nest.

He added that he wouldn't be responsible for the boy's

soul, clergyman or no clergyman. Then he lost his temper and referred Mr. Atkinson to the committee.

The committee were pained, they were astonished, they were very explanatory, and when they saw they weren't going to be successful they became offended.

They were all that a committee should be. Even the magistrate was referred to, but the boy's sentence was over. He was a good boy, no one could prevent his going out if he had a clergyman to go to. This was the worst of the legal bond between Church and State. They ought to back each other's horses, but they were not obliged to.

Mr. Atkinson was assured of the disapproval of all the penitentiary authorities, but he got his own way.

They flung at him as parting shots, 'Of course if anything goes wrong you will be held directly responsible,' and that even more dire threat, 'I suppose you will be prepared to pay for the boy out of your own pocket?'

But Mr. Atkinson unexpectedly asserted that that sacred commodity, his own pocket, was a mere detail. Nobody could say anything after that, but when he had gone they all decided that Mr. Atkinson couldn't be at all rich.

Then the authorities tackled the boy. They told him first that, of course, he was a free agent; then they explained how unpractical the clergy—excellent in the pulpit or for the next world—were in every-day life.

They painted every-day life for Jim. They reminded him of his unfortunate stigma. A boy who had killed his father was not likely to get on anywhere. Such stories crop up. They took away his freedom as an agent.

Then the chaplain, a wily man, who was used to human nature and knew what a weapon you can make of dreams, wrung the barge out of Jim and mocked him with it.

Jim, sullen and wild-eyed, outfaced this raillery. Then they stopped laughing and told him abruptly that he was insubordinate, ungrateful, and appallingly ignorant of life.

Nothing answered. They did all round the very best they could for Jim and they met with the usual reward of the benevolent—the complete failure of their victim to appreciate their noble purposes.

Apparently Jim did not even know that they were being kind to him. He wanted to get out.

It didn't quite come to his making this astonishing confession. He cloaked it under the blessed form of words left him by Mr. Atkinson. He repeated with the awful persistency of a ticking clock—

'Please, I want ter go ter Mr. Atkinson termorrer.'

Nothing more and nothing less.

They told him plainly he could never come back if he did, and he did not blink an eyelid. Then they suggested his signing a paper to say he would come back after all. But he only repeated his formula without signing the paper, and in the end it got him off.

Bewildered, disgraced, without a handshake, Jim left the safeguards of his only home.

It was an excellent institution in many ways. It did wonders for some of its inmates, and it had done something for Jim. It had taught him to love liberty and to ignore danger, and this is not a poor equipment.

The door shut behind him with a solemn clang. He had four shillings and Mr. Atkinson's address in his pocket.

It was raining a little, but the earth looked very green and young. There was nothing unfriendly in the air, and nothing watchful. It was the first time he had been alone for three years.

Jim flung up his head and started down the road whistling.

CHAPTER V

ARTHUR ATKINSON had no difficulty in finding an obliging skipper.

He was well known on the water side as a parson who came on your decks without malice; he never looked into things or suggested mission services. He simply sat harmlessly and smoked good coarse tobacco which he shared alike with the just and the unjust.

He did not offer drinks or take them; in fact he did not deal in ready money at all, so that from the first it was realised that he wasn't going to get anything out of anybody—nor was any one, however wily, going to get anything beyond tobacco out of him. It was a restful situation. The parson simply became an accustomed and friendly figure.

In time his advice was asked upon Saturday night disputes, and later he was successfully promoted to domestic brawls. He was remarkably useful in a deal, and it was discovered that superior lawyers of low reputation and large practice couldn't get round the parson. He seemed simple enough, but he knew things.

He read contracts and, with an unerring instinct, put his broad, tobacco-stained finger on doubtful clauses. He would push his hat back from his dreamy forehead and say with deadly mildness—

'Now just explain this, will you? I don't quite follow this clause.' And it had to be explained to him.

Nothing glib ever got by him. He would swing his tall figure in the direction of a liar, listen with careful attention, shake his head vaguely—not in the least reproachfully—and drift away from the speaker, leaving a disappointing sensation of exposure and flatness behind him.

The parson was a valued repository of deeds. I. O. U.'s and last wills and testaments lay carefully labelled in cardboard boxes all over his bedroom floor.

Joe Moucher, the skipper he had chosen for Jim, was among his best friends. The skipper's language was reported to be the worst on the river; he was considered by the port authority, not without reason, to be a hard-drinking, doubtful and rather disreputable person. But he had never done any one else any particular harm. His boys liked him, his dog never winced at his voice and it was not the first time that he had actively co-operated with the parson to give some one or other a 'turn.'

It was to his barge that Jim was conducted, replete with tea, after the initiation of a long silent hour with his new friend. It could not be said that their conversation had been either brilliant or instructive, but it left Jim with the feeling that he wasn't in any direction being 'got at.'

Arthur had provided him with an outfit of second-hand clothes—clothes that had no possible hint of penitentiaries—that breathed of barges, and in which Jim saw himself in a small, dusty mirror as beautifully like any other rough and independent boy who never had to escape being a schoolmaster.

The parson did not have a house; he had two large rooms, full of books, fishing-rods, dust and unanswered letters.

He could get a spare room when he wanted it, and he explained to Jim that he should like him to turn up between his voyages, if he had nowhere better to go.

Then he dragged down half a dozen volumes from a shelf, tied them inefficiently with string, and put them under his arm.

'You might sometimes want to read,' he explained apologetically. 'One does, you know.'

Jim scowled frankly. He was not going to read; reading led to schoolmastering; he was relieved when the skipper objected to the books more strongly still.

Joe Moucher was a man of few words, fewer ideas, and incredible superstitions. He said there was something not quite right about books on a barge. He couldn't exactly remember a case in point, but if anything did happen he should know at once it was the books. Arthur had dropped them upon the deck, and the skipper turned them over gingerly with his foot. He said he didn't mind a Bible—with a Bible and a black cat you were more or less safe, even with a

raft in mid-ocean; but anything less than sacred was dangerous truck on the water and might lead to their fouling an anchor.

'Any'ow,' he finished moodily, 'wot's the use of bringing me a bloke fer me ter break into a barge while you're a-trying ter break 'im inter books? 'E won't know which way 'is nose is put on 'is face. Not that it much matters with 'is features bein' wot they are. 'Is nose looks like something washed up by the tide nah; and it'll look worse by the time I'm done with 'im!'

The skipper gave a deep growl, which was promptly echoed by his dog Cadger, but in both cases it was an empty threat and preceded the direct benevolence of kippers.

The skipper prepared these delicacies himself with a grimy but agile paw.

'Arter this you do the cooking,' he explained to Jim, 'an' wot yer don't cook right yer'll 'ave to eat, stummick or no stummick, ter teach yer to be light-'anded.'

Jim's duties were arduous only by fits and starts. He was to cook all the meals, keep the barge as clean as, and no cleaner, than the skipper required.

'I don't want no baby's bassinetts,' the skipper explained, 'same as these 'ere yachts they call 'emselves, that I wouldn't take on in a puddle. You get some of the coal off and when I 'oller, "Nuff," yer stop using up good water as could be mixed with rum if I carried any, as a-course I don't!'

The skipper looked defensively at the parson. He had smuggled rum regularly and successfully up and down the river for many years, and he often felt uncomfortably uncertain whether the parson knew it or not. He could be trusted not to say anything if he did suspect it, but he could not be trusted to sympathise. He had ideas which were all right in a pulpit, but out of place on a barge.

Jim was to keep a look-out on deck and learn to use the poles in the narrow waterways. He would be shown how to tow when the occasion arose, and he was to manage the steering-gear when the skipper wasn't on deck. Finally, he was not to make the kind of nuisance of himself which the skipper knew he would.

In return for these attentions he was to receive board

and lodging for two voyages, and if he was efficient he would then gradually arrive at the princely wage of a pound a week. If he wasn't efficient he would go.

'Religion or no religion,' the skipper finished, 'if yer ain't fitted for life on the water yer'd better get off of it, even if the Gospels says the direct con-trary.'

Arthur ate one kipper in their company and wandered thoughtfully away, leaving the books behind him.

The scheme of the barge was not his scheme, and he was more favourably inclined to it than if it had been.

Here was a case of a bruised reed, and it would choose its own method of getting over its bruises.

Arthur would have proposed for Jim a good grammar school with special coaching for a year, and then, if he could have afforded it, the university; but he saw that the iron of enforced education had eaten too deeply into the boy's spirit.

He associated all learning with the penitentiary, and until he discovered for himself that freedom lay in knowledge, he was safer without it. If he were really intelligent he would discover this primary truth quickly. Fortunately, he was young enough to spare time for the lessons of experience.

The skipper, with Cadger at his heels, left the *Water-Lily* in Jim's charge, and slouched slowly away up the narrow Greenhithe Lane toward his favourite public-house.

It was a sweet-scented June evening. Jim leaned over the barge's side and washed the tea things in the Thames. Footsteps and shouted jokes reached him like music across a stretch of water. All the summer sounds were soft and slow. Around him was a waste of sun-illumined water, colourless and light.

A ball of red fire settled down slowly and mysteriously into an evening mist.

Other barges passed with their orange sails growing dark. The river lapped against the boat's side, singing the persistent low song of moving waters.

Jim lay motionless upon the deck, soaked in the immensity of his freedom.

Not even the parson had guessed what solitude would mean to this child of crowds and baffled privacies.

Jim had never been alone in his life. In his childhood there were always Eliza and the other children, and the streets were never empty. In the penitentiary there were twelve boys in each dormitory; and supervision all day long. Privacy is expensive. It is usually supposed that people who can't afford it don't want it, but Jim had always wanted it.

He lay crouched into the deck as if he thirsted to be forgotten.

He longed even for the vanishing of the friendly colour in the sky. He wanted the dark to envelop him with great wings, and hide him out of sight. Nobody was after him now.

An ache, that had been so long a part of his being that he had not discovered it was pain, felt suddenly at ease.

For the first time without flinching he thought of his mother's face.

He saw again the rare smile which altered her expression like an unexpected ray of light, and which only he could rouse.

He wondered how death had come to her, and if it was quick and kind. Like all children of the poor he knew death and love without illusion. They were concrete to him and unaccompanied by fancies.

Jim had a healthy animal's horror of extinction for himself, but not for her. His mother was too tired of life to know fear. It couldn't have made it much harder for her, his father being gone, but it wouldn't have been much easier without the money. She had taken in washing.

Eliza had not been any help to her. Eliza was like an open mouth without eyes. She saw nothing, but she took what she could get.

Jim had asked Arthur about her, but Arthur had not been able to tell him very much. He believed that she had disappeared before Mrs. Barton died. Rats could teach nothing to Eliza. She always knew a sinking ship by the feel of her self-preserving feet.

Oddly enough it was Jim who had the maternal instinct of the family. It had been a little smothered by the acuteness of his personal struggle, but the moment the pressure was removed it sprang into life again. He wanted to save and protect all his scattered family, even Eliza.

He had never forgotten Bert's and the Baby's addresses. Arthur said they were quite safe, Margaret in a sisterhood, and Bert with the waifs and strays. Sisters were very religious women, generally quite good, who looked after children, and though they were called sisters they did not bear the least resemblance to Eliza.

Jim had to make a few voyages before he would have earned enough to take the children a humming top and a doll, as well as pay his fares. Bert was six years old—a perfect age for a humming top—and he hoped Margaret, who was now three and a half, would like almost any doll.

The future opened before Jim as the dark descended—wide and without the limitations of experience.

He had never seen the night before; something wrenched his heart with pleasure.

At first he thought the stars were human lights—London perhaps—and then he saw how much farther off they were, and how high, and knew that they were stars.

Jim had learned fluently and superficially about stars from books, but if you always went to bed before the dark, or with the blinds down, you did not see them.

They were pointed and alive, in endless circles through the soft sky, not large and luminous like southern stars, which seem so near a hand could touch them, but sparkling and cold, and very far away.

What place had they in the great darkness of the universe? And what had he who watched them for the first time? Had he any kinship with the stars?

Where would he be if he fell into the sky? He held his breath with awe, for suddenly, as he asked himself the question, one of the sparkling lights detached itself and fell. Fell—and he could watch it fall, flash down and down in one great silvery plunge—into the dark!

It vanished. Rank upon rank the other stars remained, unshaken and at peace. The heavens composed themselves anew; there was no gap. Where was the fallen star?

It must be somewhere—or could you get where there was nowhere?

It had detached itself as suddenly and hurriedly as his

father's soul under the blows of the poker—that, too, must have fallen somewhere.

Was it terrible to fall? Jim had not meant to make his father rush so suddenly into the dark.

Perhaps nobody ever knew the only things that you wanted to know.

Far away a bell rang out. It was a clock striking. Each note fell on the light air with a long reverberation. Nothing had to be done about it.

Jim crouched still lower on the deck; the velvet dark grew thick and nearer; the stars swam mistily before his eyes.

'Wot I got on my barge,' Joe Moucher was saying complacently to his friends, 'is a murderer. Yus! Murdered 'is father at the age of fourteen as if 'e was a rat—with a fire-iron. That's what 'e is! Another two years and 'e'd 'ave swung for it! Parson brought 'im along.

'"Give him a chanct," he says, and I laughs at 'im, fer I knows 'is ways.

'"Yus!" I says. "An' then anover chanct! And then anover chanct! Gord! Yer'd give a pack of wolves a chanct if yer 'ad 'em 'andy!"

'Owsomdever, I took the boy on in the end, and that's why I shan't 'urry back. No fear! Stands ter reason if yer can do your father in at fourteen, at seventeen yer must be 'arf-way ter a watch-dog! There ain't no need fer me to 'ang about on board, now I got a murderer ter look after me barge.' And the murderer, his heavy eyes closed in sleep, turned as softly upon the deck of *The Water-Lily* as if he slept upon his mother's breast.

CHAPTER VI

THE skipper's face looked as if it were made out of rough mahogany insufficiently planed. His nose had been broken in a far-off fight, and had settled crookedly at an angle of forty-five degrees. His slouching, heavly-built figure and somnolent eyes gave no hint of alertness, and yet no craft on the river escaped his apprising glance.

He gave his orders monosyllabically and without any air of authority.

They were only orders because fatalities lay on the other side of them.

Jim's irritated fighting spirit found infinite repose in a master who made no claims beyond the obvious ones of common sense. He could obey and yet forfeit nothing of his self-respect.

Even the skipper's bad language, when Jim failed to carry out successfully any of his new duties, was perfunctory and without malice. He could not do much to teach Jim the river lore beyond swearing, because he knew it like the back of his hand and had worked for forty years on a barge.

Everything that was new to Jim had faded into unconsciousness with the skipper.

He had long ago forgotten the reasons for his automatic skill, his rules were perfectly successful, but they were all rules of thumb.

In his bottomless mind there were no visible landmarks. He pushed his way through obstacles as if they were the incidents of dreams. Dangers were no more to him than awkward corners, and the river was the only personality he had definitely studied.

The skipper had very few dealings with his boys beyond seeing that they were fed, and keeping a jaundiced eye upon their carrying out his orders. He looked upon boys in the lump as a kind of tool which is often not where you

expect to find it, and continually liable to go wrong. Some boys were more liable than others, and when they were below this shifting standard the skipper got rid of them.

His new boy was different. He was at first more like a half-drowned kitten than a boy. He had been badly handled, and was panicky and sometimes clumsy from fright—but he had none of the ordinary tricks of boys. When he understood his work he did it thoroughly and with method, and he did not fly into mischief the moment it was over.

When they were moored offshore he did not vanish for hours to play with other boys and leave on his skipper the burden of the barge; and finally, he did not tease the skipper's dog—he made friends with him. The skipper vaguely observed all these things, but the last made the deepest impression upon him.

Cadger had never been known to make friends with a boy before. He instinctively and reasonably disliked them.

Boys had once tied a tin can to his tail and nearly driven him mad.

The skipper had rescued him at a critical moment; released his tail, carried him gently, all trembling and slobbery with panic, into a dark quiet place, given him a drink, a sense of mastership and well-being, and rounded off the affair with a bone. From that moment Cadger had chosen the skipper's heel as the exact spot in the universe most suitable for a small yellow dog. He was not otherwise ferocious, but he would have disputed with a tiger his right to the skipper's heel.

At first Cadger looked the other way at Jim's approach, and stiffened with a curious and unnatural daintiness of step, but Jim passed by him without offence or menace.

No names or surreptitious stones were shied at Cadger by this stranger. His bones were not only left in his favourite corner, but fresh bones were sorted out from dishes and placed before him. He ended by doubting if Jim were a boy at all.

He made up his mind to investigate him more closely. He approached Jim gingerly with the intention of sniffing as he passed him; perhaps he would not quite sniff; something redolent of boy might reach him in time to prevent him from lowering his dignity to this direct approach.

But nothing revealing happened. Jim sat with unblinking eyes, gazing at a green bank.

Cadger decided to sniff. He came still closer. Jim did not turn his head. Cadger sat within reach of his hand, ready to leap away at the faintest threat, but there were no threats. It was a warm day, and by and by his attention relaxed; he slept.

When he woke up Jim's hand was moving slowly and gratifyingly behind his ear. It was a hard hand, but it knew instinctively how to handle a dog.

It was not bitten; instead, after a momentary pause, a rough tongue touched it, the brief curled tail—a misplaced feature on the part of Cadger's mother—wagged beneficently. Cadger had recognised a boy.

Cadger was never faithless to the skipper, but he enlarged his world. From henceforth he had another heel to follow, another human eye to watch; and though a man may fail to serve two masters it is well within the powers of a small yellow dog.

There were occasionally awkward moments when Cadger could not get his human beings to herd together nicely; when the skipper went off in one direction and Jim remained obstinately in another, and Cadger would have to make up a frantically conflicting mind as to where his allegiance was most due. But these crises were infrequent, and Cadger surmounted them successfully.

The skipper's signal for Cadger was a growl. Jim expressed his need by a whistle. Mercifully, they had the sense to avoid making counter demonstrations at the same time. If the skipper growled, Jim withheld his whistle, and if Jim whistled it almost seemed as if the skipper purposely withheld his growl.

Few barges on the river showed less domestic friction.

It was the month of June, and all the life of the earth was new to Jim. He had been born in mean streets full of smoke and dirt, and then shut away in a building as solid and lifeless as a steel safe.

It was incredible to wake in the early mornings to the easy sliding motion of the barge, and to look into a free world brimming over with light.

A buttercup field by the waterside came upon Jim as suddenly as an act of creation, the thick, wet green of the grass loosened to let the light of the flowers through—each cup a glistening yellow world. The elms above the little cups broke in a mist of green parted by sudden breezes, and the sunbeams fell through in shifting showers of gold.

Heavy coral buds and high pink loose strife lined the river banks; the bulrushes whispered incessant secrets; meadow-sweet wound deep down to the water's edge, spreading its fragrance far and wide.

Blue forget-me-nots burned in ardent patches of colour under cool green reeds, and flat-headed, wide, white cups of water-lilies floated out serenely upon the surface of the stream.

All the boy's stunned senses were alive and filled themselves with what he saw.

He had been for years like some menaced sea-anemone cramped into a perpetual ball. Now at last the menace was removed; and like the sea-anemone when it realises that only its own element surrounds it, Jim's whole being expanded to meet the friendly tide.

He pushed out in all directions, tentatively tasting his freedom.

He had no sense of equilibrium. Everything he fell into astonished him.

He did many clumsy and awkward things, but on the whole no cruel ones. He had a rough common sense which showed an aptitude for dealing with fact, and a strong feeling of compassion which showed a deeper aptitude for dealing with human beings. His errors were the leniently regarded waterside errors of getting drunk and fighting.

Whenever the barge moved near his old home Jim found his shadowed history again—a carless taunt stirred his heart like fire, and he returned to the barge covered with blood and bruises.

His great physical strength made him a dangerous opponent, but he was often set upon by half a dozen boys together.

He met these attacks fiercely and without complaints, and by and by they ceased. But not the memory of being attacked.

Farther down the river the world knew nothing of Jim,

but he did not take advantage of their ignorance. He was morose to strangers. It seemed to Jim that human justice did not know when to stop. It invented punishments that had no relation to crimes, and when they were over it was dissatisfied with its own inventions and forgot to ratify them by forgiveness. Jim would not make friends with people who, if they knew his history, would look askance at him.

He took the edges of crowds and listened without comment to the fiery talk of public-houses.

His head was a jumble of ideas and instincts; he was like a prisoner from an underground dungeon who, when he comes out into the day, stumbles and is drunk with light.

He caught at socialism raw, and thirsted for revolution.

The wrongs of the world were as plain to Jim as the strength of his hands, and he felt there should be a direct correspondence between the two. He saw the gaps in human mercy and he wanted to be used to stop them.

But though his mind was full of hard and angry questions, his sensations were more and more peaceful and normal. The life of the barge and of nature beat down his inward ferocity. Something strangely like a sense of happiness pervaded him.

The badinage of river-craft is very infectious, and though Jim never laughed aloud, the spirit of laughter touched him. He developed a power of repartee, egged on by the skipper. His heavy mouth took an ironic twist, his hard eyes lit with occasional sparks of laughter and friendliness. They were an astonishing pair of eyes, dark-blue and very open, and they gazed out upon the world and man searchingly and without surrender.

Jim's world was narrow but it was deep. He loved his parson with reverence, his skipper with indulgence, Cadger with protective companionableness.

He had no Sunday clothes, but he had a cap with a brim and a cap without, and when he went to see Arthur Atkinson he wore the cap with a brim.

Jim put the skipper to bed when he was drunk, and he caught water-rats on the river banks with Cadger every Sunday. His outer life was complete, but something else soon began to stir in him.

He found his inner life again, the life he had had in his early childhood, behind the blind efficiency of his fists; but it was deeper now and more unquiet. Jim was not sure what he wanted; it was not the girls upon the river banks, though they came into his dreams and confused his mind with new sensations. He had not the courage to make a directer approach to them than dreams—he was afraid they might taunt him with being a murderer, and he could not knock them down if they did.

Besides, he was proud and had no money—almost all the girls he could think of expected glasses of beer or ices. Jim was too young to be indiscriminate, and lovely girls in muslin frocks despised boys without Sunday clothes. His dreams went farther than his instincts.

It was six o'clock and the sunlight lay faint and pink upon the silvery dew-drenched fields.

Jim left the barge and strolled down the towing-path under the shifting sunbeams. His eyes rested vaguely on a weeping-willow across the stream, when something splendid and vivid, which made him hold his breath for an instant, darted out upon the river.

He could not see plainly what it was. It passed in a flash, but he saw that it had wings, and was blue.

It was like watching a sapphire tossed from bank to bank in the sun; only this creature was more alive and more entrancing than any jewel.

For a long time Jim never moved. His stirred senses settled slowly over the vision.

Public-houses and curses, water-rats and riverside baths, were not disturbed by his vision, but they were less real to Jim afterward than the blue wing of a bird.

They belonged to the order of things he knew and could deal with; but beauty stood for the world he did not know—and craved with all the force of his being to master and to understand.

CHAPTER VII

FOR three years in the penitentiary Jim's inner life had stopped; he had had no dealings with it. All his consciousness was in his hot rebellious pride; slavery numbed his imagination. He could force himself to obey only by trampling out his thoughts. His hands and the mechanical part of his mind lived, not his heart. He did not want to understand anything because if he had understood it he could not have borne it. He was like a bird that will not sing in the dark.

Now, at the signal of beauty, a rush of new questions came upon him; the floodgates of his inner life swung back. Jim would have liked to talk to the parson about his new experiences, but he had no words for his thoughts.

There was a new language to meet this new life, and he had not yet mastered it.

When the parson took him off for a long country walk behind the smoke, and Jim first saw an apple orchard in the spring break like dawn across his bewildered vision, the only thing he could say was,—

'Gord! Look at them sheep under the ruddy trees!'

Arthur understood that Jim really knew and felt more than he could express; but not even Arthur knew how much more.

Books came to Jim's rescue. Books were full of his new life; they had something which was outside himself, but they corresponded as well with what he had within.

When he understood words better he knew that what he felt in them was a sense of inclusion and of permanence.

Something that stood behind time broke through and claimed him; something that stood behind space put out a friendly hand.

Jim could not think easily—letting his thoughts go like water through a sieve, leaving no trace behind. The abstract was merely the concrete at a distance to him.

When he had a thought he put it into instant execution,

and gripped on to a fresh conception like a dog on to a bone. He never succeeded in understanding people whose thoughts come readily and drop; it was easier for him to follow the skipper's processes, who had no ideas at all but moved unconsciously from instinct to habit. The skipper at any rate wasted nothing that came to him; though Jim wished he could sometimes make the skipper explain what things meant.

The skipper had never read a book in his life. All the attention he had was spent on the river traffic. He gave his new boy the benefit of a few rough river rules, and did not leave him in charge until he saw that he understood them, but he was seldom to be tempted beyond the moment's need.

The river, he admitted, was a bag of tricks, and no mistake. She was like a woman. Sometimes she had to be studied and others she'd be better left alone. She was never twice alike, and when she looked most secure and bland she was apt to upset you by starting a new current.

A barge was all right in the open water, except for the traffic. It was the bridges that caught you out; the bridges, and of course the fogs.

The skipper was not a person to whom forethought made any appeal, but he agreed that Jim had just as well think out what he'd do if he were alone in a fog with no lights visible to guide. You had to keep the river in your mind and then feel your way along, as a blind man feels his way across Trafalgar Square at noon; keeping your ears well open—and luck—pulled you through.

Things were mostly luck, the skipper explained, unless you upset them. People said there were rules—to hear a pilot talk you'd think the river was like a flight of steps without a bend to them; all you had to do was to get your foot on them right, and climb up. But you couldn't make rules about water; you had to have sense for it; and even when you had sense there was traffic.

'Nah, traffic,' the skipper said in his leisurely drawl, steering to avoid two lighters and a wobbling line of barges tossed unevenly behind them; 'you got ter get used to traffic, same as a man gets used to putting on his trahsers. 'Abit, that's what saves a man at a pinch; don't you forget it.

'Don't you never trust a fellow as does things differently each time. Flighty, that's wot 'e is—and it don't do ter be flighty on a barge. Yer want ter do things the same till you *can't* do 'em no different when there isn't time to think—and things is going crooked all arahnd you.

'Everythink on this 'ere river knows its own mind, or oughter. You get to know yours and stick to it.

'Ladies and 'ens are the worst traffic dodgers I know on —'cos why? 'Cos they won't keep still and see wot the other person's doin' of. Every collision I ever come acrorst was 'cos somebody started movin' out of turn. 'Oot and wait! 'Oot and wait; that'll bring a man out of the worst mess a dark night ever shoves 'im inter!'

They were going up to London for the first time, and Jim watched the thickening traffic with fascinated eyes. No more river banks now, no more towing and rat catching and hours of slow surrender to sunshine and to dreams. They were out on the broad reaches of the Thames, surrounded by its unhindered, multitudinous life. The great stream of outgoing and incoming boats never seemed to jostle; all the smaller fry manœuvred briskly, as at her appointed hour an ocean-going liner claimed her unfettered way. The tramps got all the sea-room they had a right to expect and no more, though they squealed for it.

The police boats darted in and out like swallows catching flies on summer evenings.

The ineffable sluggish slowness of the drifters was short-circuited by a series of light-handed miracles.

The flat incapacity of a barge to turn, when there is oceans of room for her to do it in, passed without mishap in showers of fiery language.

Row-boats hovered in and out of the broad stream of traffic like mosquitoes, threatening at every turn to get run down, and skilfully pulling from under at the last conceivable and abusive moment.

The skipper stood on the deck with his somnolent eyes half open, giving his quiet, perfunctory orders. Jim's mind surged with doubts and questions. He wanted to understand the river. He wanted to learn the landmarks; he craved for direct instructions, which were as flatly denied him.

'Gord!' the skipper replied to his insistent questions, 'wot's the damned use of all that scum on the top of the beer? It don't reach anywhere, and it's windy. You'll learn in time. You do what I says when I says it, and if you don't see why it don't make no odds to the river, does it?

'Wot you want is an *'ead*. In a tight place if you 'ave an 'ead you get aht, and if yer 'aven't an 'ead yer get under. That's all there is to it.

''Ow does a dog learn to swim? Don't listen ter no chat aht of a book abaht it, does 'e? Nah! Fro' 'im in! Fro' 'im in!'

The skipper spat past Cadger's head, barely grazing an ear.

He was not more communincative about the city which lay before them.

'Yus,' he said, pointing to a great smudge that lay upon the horizon, 'that's London. Don't yer give no back talk to nobody and they won't do you no 'arm. It ain't no different to any other place, as fur as I can see.'

But to Jim it was already different. He had often thought about London; and the burglars, the prison boys had told him about, breaking into houses full of jewels. It was where books were made; and all the great laws, that when you broke them, whether you knew them or not, you got so heavily punished for.

He was in London now, though it was only houses in a bunch. There were more of them than Jim had ever seen before; line upon line of uncertain grayness stretched before him, broken as an old man's teeth. Here was a tall tower, and a big square building, and next to it small, squat houses like the shells of inconspicuous fishes.

Immense warehouses brooded over empty docks. Chimneys sprang up like a forest and died suddenly into insignificant spaces full of tin cans.

Bridges and boats blocked the way, and opened out at intervals into curious vistas—a black wharf; a row of houses like disused biscuit tins; a long, corrugated iron caterpillar, where men and women worked furiously under a great glass roof, like creatures in a hive. But their fury and their ugliness passed quickly into a sudden arbour of greenery out of

which rose a great cathedral, and a road as wide as a river, down which the traffic roared and fumbled its blind way. Jim watched the road till it, too, lost itself in miles and miles of small, gray houses, sucking up all the life around them into an indistinguishable dirty sponge. This was London.

The barge put in at a dock near the Radcliff Highway, and the skipper remarked briefly that Jim had better sleep on board, and that they wouldn't begin to unload until to-morrow. Then he dropped into a small boat which shot out suddenly from under them like an offertory plate for a six pence, and Jim and Cadger were left alone.

It was curious that Jim felt more alone than he had ever felt before, when there were so many people around them.

The night would have been dark in the country, but it was not dark in London. The river was ablaze with lights —they hung like a gigantic string of pearls on a dusky neck, glittering all night long.

Jim could not sleep; the hours were too full of life and colour. He could hear all round him the shouts and songs of human beings, their laughter and their curses. It seemed to him that he was surrounded and invaded by a million lives. None of them left him alone and yet none of them belonged to him. He was as disconnected as a separate bead, and yet, he, too, was in that perpetual moving circle of lights and human beings.

The sounds died down with the passing of the night, but the lights still burned on, furtive and mysterious, until the colourless dawn.

Everything was very still for a time, like a child that has cried itself into an exhausted sleep, and then far off the rumble of the country carts began, and one by one the sounds returned and fixed themselves into the voice of London.

The barge unloaded all that day and all the next, so that Jim had plenty of time to see what the city was like; but it never looked any different—gray houses and more gray houses, and a noise like a persistent hammering upon a door that no one ever opened.

Far away up the river, beyond anything Jim could ever reach, there were shining towers.

CHAPTER VIII

ALL day there had been wisps and banks of fog. The ground was as wet as a sponge, and the sky was low and very heavy. The river banks seemed extraordinarily near and still. Sound was as muffled as footsteps at a funeral.

Jim had been six months on the river now, and he was used to every change in her perpetual variety. He looked about him with the settled look of eyes that study water and search out wind. But there was no advantage he could take of the heavy, breathless day, no stir upon the water; even the leaves on the November trees, those brittle and fugitive last children of the year, hung safe and still. Jim worked his pole steadily in and out of the thick water.

The barge moved very slowly, as if through treacle. The banks slid away from her like the last solidity of earthly things.

Fog came up from the sea, at first with a deceptive air of leisure, blotting out the landmarks one by one, and then, in a sudden stroke, hiding the last vestige of the day. The sky was gone, the day was gone; even the water was lost.

Jim could not see the end of his pole. His hand slipped away from him into space, and reappeared mysteriously out of clammy whiteness.

Cadger, the moisture standing in big drops all over him, became nothing but a shadowy point. He kept up a dejected sniffing to remind Jim that he was but a reluctant companion. The skipper was downstairs, warm with an oil-lamp behind him, like a creature in another world.

But Cadger, with the code of the perfect lover, knew that his duty was with the more uncomfortable of his two gods. He regretted the discomfort, but it never occurred to him to evade it.

All around them, from far and near, tortured sirens hooted their unquiet thoughts, sometimes far away and flabby, with the piteousness of creatures lost and insecure, sometimes with

an imperative shriek, right above them out of the dense wall of fog. Jim's ear was trained—he knew which siren could be ignored and which his whole being must respond to, without the loss of a second. Nothing is safer than a barge ninety-nine times out of a hundred, and nothing more helpless in that hundredth moment when the fog blinds her, and her heavy bulk can neither see nor turn.

Jim was soaked through, and cold, but all his senses were alert. He held the river in his mind as a backwoodsman holds the dense reaches of a primeval forest; but he did not know her under-water secrets. The river tricked him in the dark. He was being borne down by the shifting of an invisible current, straight against the side of an iron bridge.

The first sign by which Jim knew that the current had shifted was the unexpected pressure on his pole. He tried to withdraw it, and was picked off the barge as clean as if a hand had plucked and tossed him into midstream.

He had no time to think before the icy water caught him, and began to play its awful strangling game upon him in the dark.

He shut his mouth and beat upon the water with his feet and hands until he reached the surface; then he struck out in spite of the weight of his clothes, and felt his powerlessness.

He had not been frightened till then. But now he had a moment of sheer panic when it seemed to him cruel and a shame that his feeble strength should be pitted against such a heavy weight of water. He knew he must be overwhelmed. The odds were too strong against him. All his strength and courage would be sucked down and blotted out.

He set his teeth and shuffled his leaden limbs through the water without hope. If he was going to be drowned he wouldn't let go before he had to. He would pay something back.

He shouted once or twice but his voice beat feebly into the fog and was lost.

He went on with the swimming, a weight of iron contracted his arms, and his feet dragged under him as if they were anchors anxious to fasten him to the bottom of the river.

It wasn't any good struggling, but he went on struggling. His mind moved as swiftly as his limbs moved slowly. It

grasped a thousand broken flying thoughts, and let them go again. Eliza with her hard eyes and pullable hair fled through his brain; and Bert and little Margaret, clean and colourless, guarded by sad-faced Sisters in black robes. They had had nothing to say to him when he saw them, and they had nothing to say to him now—they seemed only, like Eliza, to reassert that it didn't matter where he was; the bottom of the Thames would do.

The water rose to his lips and ears and dragged him under, drenched and stiffened.

His hands clutched emptily at fog.

Then his limbs relaxed—fear slipped away from him. He became conscious of a great relief. It was as if he were being withdrawn by a sure hand into safety—to a fresh place, below the reach of fear. Nothing weighed on him any more, not his water-sodden clothes, nor the rebellion of his fighting senses.

He felt curiously light and free, and as if his mind was full of music. A sound struck hard against his withdrawing senses—the slap of a rope upon the water. He heard from an infinite distance the skipper's voice calling—

'Jim! Jim! You there, Jim!'

It was impossible to say where he was; but he didn't want to come back.

A feeble voice sounded somewhere in his brain, and a hand seized the rope—a curious, heavy hand that felt the pull and jerk of the rope's wet length run through fumbling fingers.

Then he felt the skipper's arm under him, and was hauled over the boat's side like a sack. There was nothing now but a great white darkness inside him and without.

When he came to himself Jim found that he was lying in the skipper's bunk, warmed and dry, with burning rum trickling down his throat. The skipper was roused out of his ordinary taciturnity into direct expression.

He recounted for the third time the story of Jim's rescue, decorated with his favourite expletives.

'It was that dawg that saved yer. I ain't never seed 'im in such a fantag. 'E 'ad me on the floor out of me bunk as quick as an oath. Shriek! 'E fair tore the blanket orff of me

and a-screamin' steady as if 'e was arter a rabbit. Orff 'e flew onter the deck and back ag'in ter drag at me trahsers, an' then made as if 'e'd lep into noffin' arter yer.

' 'E didn't arf worry me to get the boat aht! Current, that's wot it was. Shifted. An' the barge she just got clear of the bridge, abaht a knife's edge between 'em.

'I came on the pole arter I 'ad you inter the boat. 'Ave some more rum?

'Gord! My boy, you won't never 'ave no closer call than wot you've 'ad ternight, and don't you forget it!'

Warmth and light flowed back upon Jim's shaken senses. He felt grateful for Cadger's rough tongue against his hand, and the kindliness of the skipper's eyes welcoming him into human companionship.

This, too, was safety; it was a warm, good safety, but not as deep as the safety Jim had felt before.

He had come out of a place safer than the cabin of the barge—safer and kinder and deeper.

He was comfortable and grateful, but he missed something.

'You must 'ave put up a fight for it,' the skipper continued admiringly, 'wot wiv' yer boots on an' all.

'I never thought I'd see yer ugly mug agen. Not arter twenty minutes knockin' abaht in the river—twenty minutes proper, wot with gettin' the boat aht an' all. Not many boys—nor men neither—would 'ave 'eld aht that long, I will say that fer yer.

'Born ter be 'ung, that's what you are!'

'I had a funny feeling,' said Jim weakly. 'I fought as 'ow I'd get ter 'eaven er somethink arter I'd stopped choking.'

'No fear,' said the skipper kindly. 'Wot you struck was the river, an' an uncommon narsty piece of 'er—thick as soup and not arf so nourishing.'

'Where'd I 'ave got to,' Jim persisted, 'if I 'adn't 'ung onter that rope?'

'Bottom of the Thames,' said the skipper with conviction. ' 'Ave some more rum?'

Jim took the rum thankfully. Everything that he could touch and feel was friendly to him.

But he knew that he had been somewhere deeper than the bottom of the Thames.

CHAPTER IX

JIM stood in the National Gallery looking vaguely about him. It had occurred to him that he might test one of the great conveniences of London. It was pouring with rain—and there was nothing to pay. The walls were a blur of scarlet and gold, and there was a deadness in the air which took the edge off his not very sharp appetite for pictures. He wandered through the rooms uneasily, feeling that his blue jersey caught the eye of the custodian without attracting it.

Finally, he found an inner room where he couldn't see the custodian and there was a red velvet seat.

There was only one other person in the room, a tall, neat girl in a well-cut blue coat and skirt, who seemed no more interested in the pictures than Jim was. She sat on the red velvet seat and from time to time she moved a little so that she could see several of the rooms at once.

She was a lady, and Jim seldom looked very carefully at ladies. But something in the bend of her head struck him as strangely familiar. He moved forward so that he could see first her profile, and then her full face. She raised her eyes and shot a quick, furtive glance at him, like the lick of a flame.

He would have known her anywhere whatever she wore; and whoever she successfully pretended to be—she was Eliza.

Eliza was equally sure of Jim, but it took her a moment or two to decide to show it. Her eyes, without seeming to move, took in with caution the surrounding emptiness. Then she leaned forward.

'Perhaps,' she said in a gentle, well-bred voice, 'you would like me to explain the picture to you, my good lad?'

'Garn,' said Jim impatiently. 'Wot are yer doin' of 'ere, Eliza?'

Eliza did not answer directly. She rose and moved gracefully toward the door. As she passed Jim she said aloud,

'This is the Early Tuscan room,' and in a quick undertone she added, 'We'll go outside and have a talk—follow me, but not too quickly.' She raised her hand as if she were directing him into another room more suited to his uneducated taste, and moved briskly away.

Jim was in two minds whether to follow her or not. His pride was up in arms at her subterfuge and at his own appearance.

Probably when he went outside she wouldn't be there. It would be like Eliza to have invented a ruse to get rid of him quietly. On the other hand, if she was there, she wouldn't mind if he didn't turn up.

Jim suffered under the disadvantage of caring a great deal more for Eliza than Eliza cared for him.

He wanted too much to find out what she was up to not to take the risk of being taken in by her. There was just the chance that Eliza was not up to anything, but had been decently and successfully married, but this comfortable solution was unlikely unless it had suited her book.

Jim passed on tiptoe quickly through an avenue of pictured rooms, dodging behind the custodian's back, until he found himself on the steps shared by several undecided pigeons and a sedate and inconspicuous woman's figure. After all Eliza had waited for him.

Curiosity or some vague sentiment of childhood had operated upon her rainproof spirit.

'Come along, my poor boy,' she said in her new mincing voice, for the apparent benefit of the pigeons, 'and I will give you something to eat at an A. B. C.'

Jim growled, but he followed her. Eliza never turned her head to see if he was obeying her or not.

She knew London as a housemaid knows her pantry, and she slid in and out of the traffic of Trafalgar Square as easily as melted butter slips over asparagus.

She did not speak to Jim again until she had found the exact place she wanted in a shop crowded with little tables.

Then, with a grand air, Eliza ordered tea and a poached egg for Jim, and when the driven waitress hurried off with her order, she leaned forward and said,—

'What a rum go to be sure, and when did you get out?'

She had remembered where Jim had been; though her interest was insufficient to cause her to wait for an answer.

'I don't think much of your get-up,' she added with a disapproving eye, 'but you always were a guy about your clothes.'

'Yours seem a bit of all right,' said Jim with an edge of suspicion in his voice. 'Where did you get 'em from?'

'Ah,' said Eliza, receiving the handle of a teapot with a gracious gesture, and curling her little finger delicately as she poured out the tea. 'I have plenty more better than these, but I always had a quiet taste in dress.'

This was an unnecessary lie, and it roused Jim's worst suspicions. Eliza loved bright colours, high voices with giggles at the end of them, and fashions which caused men's heads to turn after her in the street. Had she really learned better, or was she merely up to some new game?

'You ain't never been near the children,' he said accusingly. 'I seed 'em directly I got out. Margaret's with what they call Sisters—ladies in black with religion—but they give 'em enough to eat. Bert, 'e's at the Waifs and Strays—they say they're going to make a sailor out of 'im; 'e 'ankers fer the sea; but it's a rough life. I asked 'em abaht you—but they 'adn't 'eard nuffin'.'

'Oh, I knew they'd be all right,' said Eliza serenely. 'Children always fall on their feet somehow, as long as you leave them alone. If I had tried to find out about them next thing would have been I should have been expected to support them.'

''Ow did yer leave 'ome an' all?' asked Jim sullenly.

'Oh, I had to make my way in the world,' said Eliza, thoughtfully fingering a pink sugar-cake. 'There was nothing doing at home for a girl like me. I read of a place in a newspaper at New Cross and I just applied. They took me on at once, and after six months I heard mother had gone, and the home was broken up. It was just as well I *did* leave, wasn't it, with you put away and all?'

'What kind of a place,' Jim asked implacably, 'did you find out of a newspaper?'

Eliza smiled charmingly into a looking-glass and moved her hat the eighth of an inch forward.

'It suited me,' she said reflectively. 'They called it a "lady's

help." There was a widow and her daughter, the widow did the cooking; the daughter was engaged to a nice young man with a big house and garden. But soft—they all were, believing all I told them; particularly the young man. I helped them all right.'

'How long did you stay there?' asked Jim.

'Well,' said Eliza, 'the young man broke off his engagement with Miss Simmons after a while. There was quite an upset about it, so I left.'

'Don't tell me you didn't 'ave an 'and in it,' said Jim fiercely, ''cos I shouldn't believe yer!'

Eliza was not pretty, but even Jim was not sure that she wasn't. He was less sure than ever when her eyelashes came together suddenly over her glinting eyes.

'I daresay,' she said consideringly, 'I helped it on a bit. They weren't what I called properly suited for each other, on account of their both being so soft.

'I was by way of being engaged to that young man myself for a time. In some ways I might have done worse. I could have married him as easily as picking up a crumb; but who wants to live with a man who won't ever do anything different?

'He had a mother and three sisters on his hands, too, and whenever I went there to tea they all started crying. It quite took the edge off my appetite! Of course I could have got them turned out after a bit, but Joe, he was the same kind of kiss-and-cry character himself. As far as I could see he was meant to be the fourth sister, and had been turned out a man by accident.

'I didn't say anything definite to him one way or another, for he was something to fall back on in case I didn't do well elsewhere. I told him I had a dying aunt in London that I'd got to go and nurse, and that I would write. I daresay he's still waiting for that letter.'

Eliza swallowed the last pink cake thoughtfully.

'I had good luck,' she observed, with another glance at her satisfactory image in the looking-glass, 'as you see.'

'What do you call good luck?' asked Jim stubbornly. I want to 'ere all you bin up to.'

'Would you like another poached egg, dear?' Eliza replied sympathetically. 'You don't look any too well fed.'

Jim shook his head, his eyes fixed themselves on his sister's face with the intentness of a faithful watchdog guarding a perfectly irresponsible and evasive kitten.

Eliza smiled mysteriously merely to irritate him, for she was not averse to giving him her confidence. It did not occur to Eliza that there was anything to be ashamed of in a career that had obviously paid.

'I don't see why I shouldn't tell you,' she said after a reflective pause, 'seeing it's all in the family. I haven't seen you for four years now I come to think of it, and who knows when we shall meet again.'

'I came up to London as I told Joe I should, but not to the address I gave him, for I'd made that up; and I walked down Oxford Street and looked in at the shops. I had a five-pound note in my purse, and without meaning to spend it, I slipped into a shop to have a little look around. Evans', I think it was, but I don't quite remember.

'I was always fond of fur, and I saw a nice white boa lying out on a counter. I hadn't made up my mind then whether I should go back and marry Joe or not, but I knew he couldn't have afforded to buy me that fur.

'All the young ladies' backs were turned—it was the lunch hour, and hardly any one was about at the moment. I just slipped it off the counter like, and round my neck; but as luck would have it, as I turned to walk out, I saw a shop man standing behind a pile of ribbons with his eyes on me like a couple of gimlets. He stepped forward and I daresay he would have made quite a little scene over it when a young gentleman, well dressed and smiling, came up, and said,—

' "Please bring a looking-glass so that my wife can see if she likes this fur—I rather think it suits her."

'Well, the young man, he had opened his mouth to give me a bit of sauce, but he shut it again and looks from one to the other of us quite stupid-like, and I said,—

' "Well, dear, I should like it, if you don't think it's too expensive."

'And the gentleman says,—

' "Oh, not at all. Nothing is too expensive if it really suits you." And I said,—

' "Well, then, I'd like it, and the muff to match, too, please."

'I hadn't thought of the muff before, but I thought I might as well have both if he was prepared to pay for them.

'The shop young man, he hovered about until an older one came up, but nothing happened. The gentleman paid for the furs on the spot, and I walked out of the shop with the boa around my neck and the muff in my hand.

'When we stood outside on the pavement I looked at the young man and he looked at me, smiling.

'"It's not the first time, surely?" he said, and I gave him my word it was—I had never lifted furs before.

'We started up a little connection there and then. Poor George, he was a perfect gentleman always—it was a pity he went in for notes; I never have believed in forging notes. They're too easy to track. People being as careless as they are, too, it isn't necessary. A note makes a splash and gets noticed, but a little lifting here and there, if you do it carefully and have a good place handy to dump your swag, is hardly ever dropped on. George got five years soon after we'd met.'

'Then you make your living crooked?' asked Jim after a pause.

He was unable to pretend any surprise. A strange feeling of insecurity and helplessness swept over him. He was conscious that what happened to Eliza mattered horribly to him, and that nothing he could do would ever influence her destiny.

'It's like everything else,' said Eliza calmly; 'easy when you know how. Of course there are drawbacks to it. I wouldn't really choose to wear clothes like these that no one ever notices—but that's part of the game.

'I seldom take anything myself. I didn't start young enough to be sure of my fingers. You want to be as light-handed as a feather. I just go where one of my friends is working and he passes the swag on to me—I know how to take it, and I know how to get rid of it. It's not every one I'd trust to work with, but I've been fortunate so far.'

Jim's eyes searched Eliza's small, inscrutable face, but he did not ask her any further questions. He had no doubt at all about the absence of any innocence in Eliza, but he had no wish to have his certainty reinforced by a direct statement.

There are some women who keep their innocence in spite

of all adverse circumstances, and there are others who part with all they have before circumstances attempt to influence them. Eliza belonged to this latter type. She thought that innocence was dangerous as a fact, and ineffectual, as a precaution. But she had parted with it cleverly, as if it were a stolen jewel; neither its destination nor its moment of disappearance could have been traced to Eliza.

'I always liked the idea of living in a hotel,' she continued after a pause. 'I've been abroad once to the Riviera—after pearls, that was. You'd be surprised at the luxury people live in, and the little sense they have to look after what they've got. I've picked up quite a bit of education and a little French. There is a lot in education. It's a pity you don't put your mind to it, Jim.'

'There must be,' said Jim with a grim twist of his mouth. 'How long do you think you'll stick it without getting run in?'

Eliza's expressionless bright eyes rested on him without change.

'I've been talking careless to you,' she said quietly, 'but I'm not careless. I've been on this game for nearly four years. Six of my men are doing time, but I've never been let down. As I was saying to you just now, I don't take up with any one.'

'And you 'aven't never got married?' Jim asked cautiously. 'I see you got a ring on all right?'

'Rings are neither here nor there,' said Eliza calmly. 'Sometimes I'm a widow, and sometimes just plain Miss. You can pick up a thing or two without being married. I haven't ever had a real husband, of course. I don't believe in getting mixed up with the law, and I shouldn't fancy a man thinking he can do as he likes with me. Men and women are better on their own, in my opinion, especially women, if they keep their wits about them.'

'Eliza,' Jim asked, with a sudden flare of a feeling that, though he knew it was no use showing, he could not for the moment hide, 'don't you ever want to live *different?*'

Eliza stared at him a little, but she remained safe from all inconveniences—even spiritual ones. Nothing in her mind responded to Jim's urgency.

'I daresay there's something in being a duchess,' she said lightly, 'but I haven't tried it.'

'You don't seem to have done very well for *yourself,*' she added, drawing on her dark suede gloves, 'by staying respectable, if you *have* stayed respectable.'

'Gawd!' said Jim bitterly. 'I nearly swung for that poker of yours, Eliza!'

Eliza had forgotten her manipulation of the poker. She looked at a small gold watch on her wrist and said,—

'Dear me, I must be running off—but you shouldn't have struck so hard at a bread-winner, you know, Jim. I always have thought that about it. Shall I pay for the tea or will you?'

Eliza was a thrifty soul and she knew that Jim was a proud one.

He took out his lean purse, and Eliza, who had asked for the bill in a flute-like voice, leaned over and helped herself out of it.

'It will look more natural coming from me,' she observed; and Jim, after a moment of expostulation, agreed that it would look more natural.

CHAPTER X

ELIZA passed out of Jim's life with the same suddenness and casualness with which she had re-entered it.

When Jim asked her for her address, outside their tea-shop in the Strand, Eliza stared at him with open hostility. She said that she never stayed long anywhere and made a point of never putting anything into writing, but she agreed, not without kindly contempt, that she would write to Jim at Arthur's address, if she should need his help at any time.

'I don't see what use *you* could be,' she observed with frankness, 'but I don't mind taking the address if it'll make you feel any more comfortable. It's a pity you give yourself away so easily—but there! It will never come to anything—and I knew where that parson was, anyhow, if I'd thought he'd be any good to me. But I didn't. So long, old dear!'

And Eliza swung herself on to a rapidly moving bus with an expert skill which won even the hardened admiration of the conductor.

When Jim gave Arthur an outline of his interview with his sister, Arthur's only comment was,—

'Well, on the whole I agree with Eliza—what you want, Jim, is education. You can't do much more without it.'

'Wot do I want with an eddication on a barge?' asked Jim.

He looked at Arthur with eyes which held a flash of deep self-mockery.

'I kin push a pole.'

'Is that all you want to push?' asked Arthur. 'Of course it's all right if it is.'

Jim relapsed into silence. He was sitting over the parson's fire on a winter evening. The shadows darkened around them; their only light was the small spark at the end of their friendly pipes, and the occasional spark of the flame eating its way into the blackness of the coal.

Jim was recalling in his mind rather an odd incident which

had happened to him the week before. He was half-ashamed to speak of it even to the parson, but it had made an impression on him—difficult to shake off—and Arthur had stirred it up afresh.

Jim had been to a big meeting of dock labourers. There was great unrest on the river. The dockers were growing aware of the handicap which the long shifts, loading and unloading, were to their strangled lives. They wanted shorter shifts and better pay, and the men's leaders poured argument and flame upon the mass of their dull resentment.

Jim was, as usual, on the outskirts of the crowd, listening without much sympathy to the men who had come down from London to address the meeting.

Their speeches were glib, bitter, and superficial. They had got their arguments second-hand from newspapers and ill-digested books. They were there to make trouble; and they were making trouble; but they had not known trouble. The greatest argument was in the faces of the men before them—men who had lost the flower of their manhood at thirty; heavy, slouching figures and pasty cheeks—men worn out and spoiled with thirty-six hour shifts of ceaseless toil, followed by three days of sodden laziness. Three heavy, empty days out of the week—sickened with overwork, and with drink—like a light in darkness, making in their cloudy minds a few short spasms of exultation and warm forgetfulness.

Jim watched their faces and listened till a strange feeling grew in him, as if he were being caught hold of and pushed forward by a large, firm hand.

He was hardly conscious of how he got through the crowd and on to the platform.

A sea of smoky faces danced before him, lifted and fell, and then settled into a solid stillness.

Jim stood for a moment in silence with his heavy chin thrust forward and his blue eyes blazing, and then a torrent of words streamed from him. Words with an edge and thrust to them that went through the meeting with the rip of a squall at sea.

He knew what he wanted to say. The ache of their days was in his heart, and their emptiness. Sudden and astonishing, first-hand and without hesitation, the words poured out

of him. Eliza was part of what he had to say; prison was part of it. His words did not stick to party arguments. All the influences of Swanhill, seared into his childhood, found themselves ready for his use.

And he held the men spellbound, for they knew that what he said was true. He put in words, with the awful power of words, how they spent their days, and forced their eyes to see them with his eyes.

He gripped them with his simplicity and by his sudden, odd drops into irony and laughter—the laughter that sees the fun of the losing game, and never forgets the pain of it. He held them most by the strange force that is always behind conviction and by some odd personal magic of which he was quite unconscious.

The fierceness of their silence was like an empty cup held out for him to fill. For a time Jim was not conscious of the human element; his heart was fixed on truth; but suddenly he began to remember where he was and what he was doing.

The cloudy, blurred faces became significant and human. They were men from whom, singly, Jim was afraid to ask for a match. Panic seized him; his legs trembled under him; his tongue stammered and refused to articulate.

He stumbled off the platform hurriedly, amazed and chilled by his own audacity.

Jim had got out somehow, but not before one or two of the older men had spoken to him.

They asked him his name and urged him to join the union. One of them said,—

'You got ter get an education; you could be a leader if you got education.'

Jim had hardy noticed at the time what they said, he was possessed by a kind of horror at himself, and a longing to get away as quickly as he could. He had fled back to the river and his barge in an agony of reaction. For several days afterward he was afraid to show himself on shore, but the incident had had no sequel; unless his talk to-night was to be a sequel.

The vicar's eyes rested on Jim with a steady urgency. Was that really all he wanted, to push the pole of a barge?

'Yer can't git eddication wivaht money,' Jim said obsti-

nately. 'A pretty fool I'd look tryin' ter git an eddication nah. I 'ad my choice up at the prison and I chose different.'

'I don't think you were in a position to choose then,' said Arthur, 'and as to money—I have enough for two. I'll give you your chance now, if you'll take it. I've only been waiting for you to want it.'

Jim stared at him.

'Money,' he said with extreme resentment, "from you? Think likely I'd take it? It 'ud be a funny thing to take money from a friend.'

He spat angrily at the fire, though he was perfectly aware that it was a habit which Arthur did not particularly like.

'It would be a funnier thing not to,' said Arthur calmly, 'when your friend has it and you haven't. You wouldn't like to be cheated of your chance to set a man free if you were in my place, would you?

'I don't believe you know the value of money, or the value of life. People seldom do, who have too little—or too much of it. The value of money is what you can do with it, in order to set life free; and the value of life is to set free what there is in a man.

'It is the act of a criminal and a maniac combined to let any human power run to seed.

'Education acts on power like a corkscrew; you can't get the wine out till you've pulled the cork. All I'm doing is to hand you the corkscrew. Are you going to say you won't take it?'

Arthur seldom spoke with energy, but there was something in his voice now which Jim had never heard before—it was the anguish of all his own ineffectual years. There was no sound within the room but the faint vent of little flames in the grate.

Outside in the street were the usual Saturday night noises, shouts and songs and an occasional wavering scream.

'Are you contented with life as it is?' Arthur asked slowly. 'Or do you want to put your back into it and try to make it better?'

Jim had a vision in the quiet, twilit room. He saw Arthur's life—its stagnation and its futility, the stored wisdom of his mind, the deep and tender feelings which had had no visible

outlet. He saw pain sweeping up in waves, and human pity fighting through it and engulfed in the breaking surf.

In that very room he felt the tenseness of the life-line that pulls back the half-drowned and so often slips from the hand of the rescuer.

Jim's youth rebelled against this desultory process of compassion—it seemed like asking him to turn out of the direct current of life. Why should he not take the easy, vivid way, work and drink, love and fight, deal directly with daily labour and the reaction of daily labour?

He didn't want to be a criminal like Eliza, but he was sure his own way was easier than Arthur's. Why should he force himself to join the brittle line—that pitiful, half-defeated, struggling line of rescuers? Why not let the defeated go? Weren't there always derelicts and rubbish heaps?

Arthur had given his life, and Arthur had failed—Arthur, with his education, his intuition, his selfless kindliness.

Was there a drunken man the less for Arthur, or a woman with more honour, or a child safer from flinching at a blow? His fighting spirit chafed at the futility of sacrifice.

'What's the use of it all, parson?' he muttered. 'What's the damned use?'

Arthur put out his hand and laid it on Jim's shoulder. But he gave him no audible answer.

Jim's muscles tightened under the touch of that light, friendly hand; but for a long time he did not speak.

He was wrestling with himself to give up freedom for affection.

'All right,' he said at last grufly; 'I don't mind if I do take yer money. I don't know what I'll 'ave a go at yet, but I dessay I'll 'ave a go at somethink. Gawd! It's late. I must be getting back to the barge.'

CHAPTER XI

WHEN Jim moved a little uncertainly and heavily on to the platform at Withers he was instantly pounced upon by Mr. Bligh.

Mr. Bligh was a small, excitable man with short red hair, no eyelashes, a nose that went a little up, a chin that shelved a little down, a charming childish mouth, and the blue, swift-moving eyes of a fanatic. He was dressed in gray flannels with an open shirt and a red tie.

'My dear fellow! My dear fellow!' he cried with unaffected rapture. 'I am sure it is you! I am sure it must be! I'm Bligh. Where's dear old Atkinson? Not come, too? Well, now do you know, I call that rather shabby? And yet I don't know—perhaps not—after all, clergyman, you know?

'Here, porter, take this suit-case—heavy luggage in the van—oh, *no* heavy luggage! All right, porter; this does splendidly! People ought always to travel with no luggage; travel light and you go far—Stevenson or somebody or other says that.

'Of course, dear old Atkinson's a saint and awfully unprejudiced in his way. Still, hang it, there's the uniform. Now, I'm against all that. In the middle ages, you know, all very right and proper—look like crows and feel like crows—quite the thing for the middle ages, but dashes conversation now!

'No standing up against a uniform. I'm all for no differences—down with class distinctions! We shall have heaps in common, you know! Shall we walk up from the station?'

Mr. Bligh hardly waited for Jim's stammered consent before he dragged him down the platform and launched full tilt into a topic previously discussed with the station-master. It was difficult for Jim to follow Mr. Bligh's conversation; it involved a cottage hospital, the station-master's daughter, his opinion of medical men, and a promise of fresh vegetables.

Then it spread to the porter and included a job down the line, and his mother's rheumatism. A train put a momentary stop to it, but all the way to Warren Mr. Bligh kept darting off into cottages, like an intelligent fox-terrier determined that nothing should escape him.

'I must just step in, my dear fellow—I promised Mrs. Green some fresh eggs. She's the most delightful woman in the world, but she can't digest anything at all except fresh eggs, and she won't keep chickens. I think she must have a prejudice against chickens. We must go into it all some day, but we haven't time now.

'Oh, here's the vicar—I must just talk to him about a meeting. I want to persuade him to lend me the church rooms for a radical meeting, and he's a conservative, you know. So unfortunate. I thought *call* it a lecture on the Holy Land and throw in politics like pepper; just a seasoning here and there; how would that be? I've been to the Holy Land——'

The vicar kept them for some time. He seemed from the first to have his suspicions of the Holy Land. He reminded Mr. Bligh that his former lecture on the Alaskan fishing rights had been red-hot socialist twaddle Mr. Bligh did not seem at all annoyed by the severity of this reminder; he merely dragged Jim forward and said,—

'Nonsense, my dear fellow—nonsense. What about the ark—all went in two by two, didn't they? Where was your conservatism then? Here's one of my new boys, Jim Barton—I forget if you're church or chapel, Jim, but it doesn't matter. The vicar has a charming old church; eleventh-century font—you'll be sure to like it.'

Then he pushed Jim past the vicar, waving his hand behind him and saying,—

'Right you are about the Holy Land. Thursday at eight!' and started off at a violent pace, talking breathlessly all the time.

'A new heaven and a new earth,' Jim caught in flashes, 'at least let us have the *earth* now. That's what I say—can't *do* much about heaven till we get there! Be a pioneer. Break new ground—don't be afraid of what people say! Stand up to your principles.

'I told you I was a socialist, didn't I? All my boys are

too. We take the *Leader* and *Daily News*. My wife takes the *Morning Post*. She says we must balance.

'She's a most marvellous woman! You'll like her immensely. Religious—but one can't help that, you know. Women of her type must have religion. Religion and the *Morning Post*. But it's of no consequence. Her heart's absolutely in the right place—with the masses. You'll see for yourself.

'She comes from a very old family, the Winstantons of Alderbridge—of course you've heard of them? Conqueror, you know—knights in armour in the hall—family prayers—frightful prejudices—lost fortunes on the turf.

'She absolutely dashed me in their faces. They said—very natural on their part—"Who's Bligh?" and she said, "He's going to be my husband." Neat, wasn't it? And so quiet too.

'You wouldn't think she'd got the head she has to look at her. All solid judgment and no noise. Moves about like a shadow, agrees with everything I say—except about the Church, of course. But I tone that down before her—I hope you won't mind? I'm *with* you, absolutely.

'You say, "What's the Church done for me" don't you? You're perfectly right! The whole thing is a ridiculous mix up—exploded, too—like hitting a dead cat to talk about it.

'Bishops' Palaces now—why, it's comic opera—look at the Gospels—nowhere to lay their heads. Can't imagine an archbishop with nowhere to lay his head, can you? Think of their modern bathrooms.

'But I wouldn't for the world hurt her feelings about them. I just keep quiet. I even had the children baptized—I'm afraid you'll think that rather weak? You don't? I'm so glad!

'You see, I look at it this way. It means nothing to me at all—won't hurt the baby to have a few drops of water spooned at it. Can't take in the words at its age—doesn't really mind a surplice—cake afterwards, and godfathers and godmothers with silver mugs—a nice friendly idea. No harm done—but my wife would be wretched if we didn't do it.

'When it comes to confirmation, of course, I really don't know what I shall do, because that interferes with the liberty of the subject—don't like children taking vows and all that—but perhaps they won't? Modern children, you'll see for your-

self; but she brings them up to have extraordinary manners, reposeful very, though I was against it at first. Revolt's such a healthy sign I'm sure you agree with me, but not——'

Mr. Bligh stopped abruptly in the middle of the road; he put his tense, lean arm on Jim's shoulder and looked appealingly up at him as if the entire issue lay in Jim's hands.

'*Not* bloodshed! I *think,* not bloodshed, don't you?'

Jim's head was going round and round. He had expected the schoolmaster chosen for him by Arthur to be an ominous and incomprehensible power—Mr. Bligh was incomprehensible, but he wasn't in the least ominous.

Jim had feared that whatever he said would be wrong, and that oceans of knowledge would stare him in the face, behind barriers of displeasure. He had humbly hoped that he might break down the displeasure in time, and obtain crumbs of knowledge by perpetual efforts, but the man who confronted him in the middle of the road had no dreadful reserves of power.

Jim knew, as a dog knows, that this was a man without authority and that Mr. Bligh had in him neither protection nor any of the forces of attack. In a sense it was a relief, because there was nothing formidable in him, but Jim's heart sank as he realised that there was nothing to be expected from him either.

Mr. Bligh would be no arbiter of justice between Jim and the other boys. There was mercy in every line of his weak, intense appearance; a passionate, blind-eyed mercy that ran into mistakes as lightly as a sparrow dips itself in and out of puddles.

Jim's embarrassed eyes rested on him with a curious dumb hardness.

' 'Ose blood,' he rather naturally asked, 'don't you want for us to shed?'

It seemed a simple question, but it wasn't. It took them a mile and a half of perpetual explanation for Mr. Bligh to set forth, as he felt succinctly and clearly, an enlightened idea of the needs and methods of bloodless revolution.

'But you must read Wells,' Mr. Bligh said hurriedly, as they reached the garden gate. 'He isn't always sound, but he has glimmerings—and Bernard Shaw and Sydney Webb.

They are "vieux jeux," in a sense; but you ought to begin with them and take "les jeunes" afterwards; and you'll feel perfectly at home with us, and it'll all be quite simple.'

Then he opened the garden gate.

Jim had tried to prepare himself for luxury; he had recalled the Masters' new bright tennis lawn and the inside of their house where there were rooms in which you didn't need to do anything in particular; but he had never seen a garden like Warren Manor. The gate opened on a tiled Dutch pathway, between two high herbaceous borders swinging with bloom and sweetness.

In front of them swept a large velvety green lawn, and under a flowering pink May-tree Mrs. Bligh sat at a tea-table, surrounded by boys in white flannels.

Beyond the herbaceous borders rose the house itself, a solid Georgian house of purple-red brick.

Wisteria and climbing roses grew over the front of it. To Jim's dazzled eyes it looked as if it, too, were made of flowers. Under the study window on a square of green grass stood a magnolia-tree. The heavy white buds were carved hard and perfect, line upon smooth strong line against the green-black leaves. There was no vagueness in the splendid flowers.

The tea-table was covered with Queen Anne silver and some very good old Worcester. It would never have occurred to Mrs. Bligh not to use her best possessions regularly, even out of doors. She took beauty for granted; it was her daily bread. If anything happened to what she had, it would be very tiresome, of course, and she would have to buy more.

As her husband and Jim approached her she looked up from the tea-table and smiled. She did not move, but there was something in the quality of her smile, so unexpectedly serene and strong, that Jim felt he had never been welcomed before. He wondered if he should ever be able to smile all of a sudden, without looking silly, at some one perfectly strange?

Mrs. Bligh was dressed very simply in some light summer material which had the effect of pale sunshine. Her shady garden hat was covered with blue gauze; the colour deepened without changing the untroubled grayness of her eyes. She had long black lashes and very delicate features. Her mouth

was older than the rest of her face and a little set; but the corners of it were charming when she smiled.

She had had five children and had lost two. Her voice was very low, with a curious quality of distinctness, as if she were speaking slowly in a well-learned but foreign tongue. She said,—

'I hope you had a pleasant journey, Mr. Barton. This is Mr. Pritchard—Mr. Wivvle—Mr. Ainley. Do you take sugar in your tea?'

Her eyes, quiet, friendly, and without any hint of criticism, held Jim's while she spoke. He said in a hoarse voice that he did take sugar; he found his throat unexpectedly dry, and his knees shook under him. Mrs. Bligh did not speak or look at him again for a long time.

All her husband's pupils loved her. She had no curiosity and no eagerness; and she kept to perfection, in all the small crises of life, the steadiness of a person not concerned.

If Jim had dropped the cup she gave him—with a cleverness which he only afterward perceived—she would not have appeared to notice the accident, and no one would have guessed from her expression whether he had broken old Worcester or kitchen china. But she did not let him break it. Her quiet eyes deflected accidents.

Jim found himself without volition safely seated beside her in an incredibly comfortable chair. His feet felt enormously large and his hands unduly heavy; but he was anchored in a sure refuge, and cut off from the possible tactlessnesses of the outer world.

The other young men looked at him in a non-committal, friendly manner over Mrs. Bligh's head. Whatever they may have felt was completely hidden beneath their sense of form. They took in turns the floods of Mr. Bligh's excited companionableness as if it was a thing to which use had hardened them.

They laughed and chaffed each other over tennis. They had been playing tennis, and they were going to play again after tea. They seemed to Jim's eyes to be incapable of anything else.

He looked at their fine hands, ostentatiously smooth and clean, and yet not weak. Wivvle in particular had hands like

iron. He looked at their smooth, young faces; their controlled, untroubled eyes.

Nothing in them had been broken.

Wivvle was the handsomest; he was almost too stupid for Eton and had left to be crammed for the army. Mr. Bligh, who under all the flood of his contemporary thoughts was in command of his job, had warned the young man's parents to give him plenty of time over Wivvle.

Wivvle would take two years to learn what another boy could grasp in six months. He knew how to behave, but he didn't know how to concentrate, except of course upon the playing-fields of Eton.

Ainley was extremely intelligent, a dark, haughty-looking boy with a lively eye. He had delicate lungs and had been defrauded of half his school life, but three years of Switzerland had saved his health.

He was as strong now as the rest of them, as lifted above the pinch of life, and as unconcerned with anything disagreeable. He was more vivacious than the other two, but it was only in his manner; beneath it lay a solid block of conservative instincts with which neither his vivacity nor his intellect had anything whatever to do.

Pritchard had neither Wivvle's good looks nor Ainley s brains. He was born a gentleman and would always be rather better off than most people. He took himself very seriously and didn't want to be bothered. The presence of Jim was decidedly a bother. If he had not been attached to Mrs. Bligh and accustomed to the coaching of her husband, he would most certainly not have submitted to the presence of a boy off a barge. He would have left the place.

The other boys thought it rather a lark, but Pritchard didn't. He didn't like larks out of his own class. But Mrs. Bligh held him as she held each of them, by the invisible thread of her knowledge of how to live. Barge boys might be sprung upon Warren Manor at any moment, but she could be trusted to prevent their being a nuisance.

She was a woman who took life with gravity and presence of mind. She never underrated an obstacle or failed in the end to subdue it.

She believed in eternal verities, and used her articles of faith

as carefully as if they were matches. She found the arrangements of temporary and material things—especially as regarded her husband—needed perpetual watchfulness and self-control, and she had acquired both these qualities to perfection.

Mr. Bligh adored her primarily and completely, but he adored very easily and with ardour a great many other contradictory things. Mrs. Bligh disliked ardour and she loathed contradictions, but she had never told her husband that she had these dislikes.

Her perpetual fencing with nature never passed the barrier of her rather set small mouth. She had kept the innocence of her girlhood untouched, and she neither understood nor sympathised with passion. Her husband thought her possessed of an immaculate virtue, and her submissiveness partially hid from him the reluctance of her spirit.

Mr. Bligh tried to live up to her, and it cost him a great deal; sometimes he couldn't do it. Mrs. Bligh forgave him his lapses; but she never knew what it was that he had to forgive her. Nor did Mr. Bligh himself. His forgivenesses were always unconscious.

The centre of his wife's heart was her religion and her children. She knew nothing beyond what she had to know. Her resentment against the dual nature of life took the form of a cloistered and preserved ignorance.

She judged inflexibly; and she had never faced the bottom of either her own or any one else's heart.

She had made her husband successful and her children delightful.

Every one in her small world respected and admired her. She obeyed her religion as unobtrusively as she poured out tea. Her self-control was so great and so constantly successful that she had never discovered her lack of moral courage. Nor had any one else.

It would have been as difficult to convince Mrs. Bligh of sin as to break the shell of an oyster with a roseleaf. Sin was a thing she turned instinctively away from, and you can not convince any one of things which they instinctively evade; especially if they believe that there is something rather handsome in evasion.

A small boy of five sauntered out upon the lawn; he had

Mr. Bligh's red hair, and his father's impetuosity of spirit looked out from his mother's gray, long-lashed eyes. He darted forward when he saw Jim.

'Oh!' he cried, 'are you the boy who lives in a barge?'

It was the first direct remark which had been made to Jim since he sat down to tea, and though Mr. Bligh made a quick movement to efface it, it was wholly unnecessary.

The small hand laid on Jim's knee, the eager, uplifted face, was the most reassuring thing that had yet happened to him. His mouth took a friendly twist.

'Yus,' he said; 'I was on 'er—'er name's *The Water-Lily,* but she's seemingly given me the slip.'

'Oh,' said the enthralled listener, 'but would you—could you ever—in a most awful kindness—take me in the barge? Because you can't be going not to live in her *always,* can you?'

'Like a shot,' said Jim, 'if the river's near enough. I marked 'er course out on the map; she passes within ten mile of Warren now an' again. You shall 'ave a kipper cooked below like for you, and watch our Cadger—'e's the dorg—ketch a water rat.'

'Denis, dear, don't be a bother,' said Mrs. Bligh with her gentle distinctness.

Denis' eyes were wide with delight; the intensity of it almost took his breath away; his grip on the big knee tightened.

'Oh,' he said, turning round to the assembled tea-party with flaming cheeks and challenging eyes, 'isn't this man easily—the kindest in the world?'

This testimonial broke up the tea-party. The boys strolled off to tennis—they asked Jim casually if he had brought a racket and they said 'Really,' when he explained he couldn't play. They were too polite to laugh at his urging, in default of everything which he ought to have known, that he could knock a ball about at footer!

He had never had a cricket bat in his hands. They were quite kind about it, but none of them had ever eaten their meals with a young man who had never had a cricket bat in his hands. Even Mr. Bligh was dashed for a moment; only Mrs. Bligh appeared to think it was perfectly natural and even convenient. She said with her unemphatic kindness,—

'And now you can all go and play, can't you, while I show Mr. Barton the house?'

It seemed to Jim as if an angel had taken him by the hand and conducted him through the many mansions of another world.

Warren Manor was furnished very well. Both Mr. and Mrs. Bligh understood old furniture. It was not the kind that looks worm-eaten and black, but furniture which has the careful bloom of pricelessness and time. Everything shone with a kind of mild, fine radiance, and the carpets under their feet were as soft and deep as heather.

At first it seemed to Jim as if there were no colour in the curtains and chintzes, or in the few delicate pictures on the dull-papered walls. It took him a long time to learn the restfulness of taste, and in his private heart he reserved a terrible tenderness for turkey red and the green of billiard tables.

Mrs. Bligh made little comments as they passed from room to room—they had not the weight of explanations; but they came back to Jim afterward, as the names on a sign post haunt the cautious mind of the traveller in unknown lands.

When she left him at the door of his room she said with her faint, sweet smile,—

'I hope you will be very happy here, and will tell me anything I can do to help you.'

She liked him; she liked his honest, troubled eyes; she liked even a little his helplessness, for she perceived that it was the helplessness of a strong man at a disadvantage; and secretly, perhaps, she liked what she then and there received, the homage of his undivided heart.

Jim could get on all right with Mr. Bligh; anybody could; but it was Mrs. Bligh who after all taught him most.

She taught him so much that in the end he wondered if any one had ever taught him more.

She was the door by which all his illusions entered.

CHAPTER XII

JIM looked at his suit-case with puzzled eyes; it still seemed to him enormous. Arthur had provided him with two whole sets of underclothes, a dozen handkerchiefs, shoes as well as boots, and two perfectly good new suits.

He had never had so much in his life before, and yet Mr. Bligh, this master of equality, who saw no visible distinction between man and man, had spoken of his having no heavy luggage; and Mrs. Bligh had said,—

'I suppose the rest of your things will arrive later?'

It was true that neither of them had shown wonder when Jim explained that there was nothing more to come, but he had already learned they never showed surprise about anything that really surprised them.

Little by little, as he took in the size and aspect of his new room, the immensity of his suit-case dwindled. There was a shining wardrobe and a tall piece of furniture, very dark but with a bloom upon it, in which quantities of small brass handles revealed drawer after empty drawer, ready for clothes which he hadn't got. On a side table, under a big square glass, was a wonderful collection of china utensils, crowned by a big basin covered with fantastic painted birds, and a charmingly shaped jug to match it.

A number of little dishes covered with the same pattern stood on the table—the use of which he did not understand. He gave up in despair the question of where to put a tooth-brush—they all looked so much too handsome for tooth-brushes. Arthur had taught him this odd extra for his toilet; but he hadn't said where one had better keep it.

It was a long, oak-panelled room with four windows; they were all open, and curtained with short chintz curtains which swung to and fro in the light air, as fresh and bright as flowers.

Two windows looked out over the herbaceous borders and

the lawn, and two over a walled garden full of fruit and vegetables, with borders of herbs, sweet-williams, and heavy-headed pinks.

There was a gleaming paddock beyond the vegetable garden, and beyond the paddock sloped vague blue hills. Swallows darted to and fro, plunging out of the open sky in which they bathed, into their hidden nests under the eaves. They flew so fast and so unerringly that there was no use trying to mark their flight except by the stir of the leaves which closed after their passage.

Everything smelled of lavender and was clean, not as Jim understood cleanness, a painfully acquired, expensive process, chiefly utilitarian, but clean like an art, and to the point of beauty.

He drew in the fragant air cautiously as if he hardly had the right to breathe in so exquisite a place. He did not like to take his boots off and put them on the highly polished floor, or on the soft, flowered rug in the middle of the room.

A knock at his door disturbed him afresh. He had never had knocks at his door before—it was almost as if he had a right to keep people outside. But it was followed up very quickly by a good-looking, beautifully starched house-maid. She looked full at Jim, and all the forces of derision in her took visible form.

She knew he was a boy off a barge.

How she knew it would have been impossible to tell—but little in the house escaped her non-committal roving eyes, or the trained acuteness of her well-placed ears.

Every fibre of her being resented waiting upon him. To Jim it seemed equally strange that this haughty young lady should stand in the same relation to him as he used to stand to Polly, the Miss Masters' domestic mainstay, for whom he often ran errands. But Polly had been kind to him, and he would have liked to be kind to Emily, only he didn't know how.

Emily, holding a brass can of hot water in her hand, sneered openly.

'Wot d'yer use it fer?' Jim asked nervously as he watched her transfer it with a sharp effective movement to the basin and deposit the flowered jug upon the floor.

'Oh, wash your 'ead in it if you like, I should think by the look of you,' said Emily with instant malice. 'But I'm not 'ere to teach you manners, thank 'Eaven. Put your boots where they belong and don't let me have any of your dirty ways.'

Jim scowled at her heavily.

'You can go downstairs, my gel,' he said coldly, 'where you belong—wot's 'appened to you is your 'ead's turned—that's your trouble!'

'Well, I 'aven't waited for the likes of you to turn it,' said Emily with a high, toneless giggle. She banged the door viciously after her.

Jim poured some of the hot water into a glass and drank it gingerly. He had never drunk hot water before, but he thought he might be supposed to drink it, and if Mrs. Bligh asked him, 'How did you like your hot water?' it would be safer to have at least tried it.

Then he examined the books by his bedside. There was a volume of Bernard Shaw; *The Road Mender; Poems of Passion and of Pain;* and a French novel. They were the most incomprehensible set of books Jim had ever encountered. He tried them each by turn.

The one by Bernard Shaw had lots of words in it which seemed quite like words, but they were rattled out at you with the cut and thrust of a man who is only accustomed to use thoughts like weapons.

He did not know, as Jim knew it, that thought is a discovery and not a blade. He wounded even in the house of his friends.

As to *The Road Mender*, Jim read solidly page after page and felt exactly as if he had been eating cotton-wool. He had met road menders while he was on the barge, but they were not like this one. They were, as a rule, surly people who drank a great deal owing to the amount of dust they swallowed, and suffered from rheumatism and sore eyes. What they really liked—they expressed this with the expletives which came handiest—was Saturday nights in the Old Kent Road.

Poems of Passion and of Pain were equally thrown away upon Jim. It was true he found them painful, but he was

totally unmoved by what passion they contained. He came to the conclusion that the people the poems were about must have got upset rather easily.

Then he heard the boys come back from tennis. They all had separate rooms on the same floor. Their voices sounded extremely cheerful. He would have liked very much to go outside and speak to them, but he didn't dare.

Wivvle was next door to him.

Emily returned with more brass jugs, and after a sudden pause Jim heard quite distinctly through the open windows the sound of a kiss. He had been right about Emily's head—it was turned.

There was no harm in a kiss, but it surprised and disappointed Jim that Wivvle should have been the one to turn it. Wivvle was so handsome and straightforward and looked so much like a lord, and to Jim's unsophisticated mind it was mean of a man with overwhelming advantages to look at a girl with none.

''E didn't oughter 'ave done that,' Jim said slowly to himself. ''E oughter 'ave let 'er alone.'

The sound of a mellow-voiced gong roused him from these reflections.

If music went off suddenly in the house, what did it mean?

It occurred again after a short interval, and Jim realised that it must be a modified and harmonious form of the old bells and whistles. It was a summons, and meant that you had to go somewhere else. In the hall he was picked up by Mr. Bligh, who literally swept him into the dining-room.

'My dear fellow—— No, we don't dress; only a smoking-jacket, and that's not *de rigeur*. You're perfectly all right,' Mr. Bligh explained. 'Nothing formal here, you know, and practically no rules at all. We're in by ten o'clock, of course, out of consideration for the neighbourhood and all that, you know—and up with the lark. *Can* you manage breakfast at eight? *Good!*'

Mrs. Bligh joined them. She floated in from the garden like a white-winged moth; the neck of her soft, white dress was cut low and a string of pearls fell from it. She wore a bunch of lavender-coloured sweet peas at her waist.

She motioned to Jim to sit at her left hand. Wivvle was

on her right. He had beautiful manners, gracious and perfectly natural; his unshadowed fresh boy's eyes rested on Mrs. Bligh with frank approval.

'Yes,' she said, touching the sweet peas, 'they were the right colour, thank you.'

She smiled a little, happy, companionable smile at Wivvle, which she repeated in turn for Pritchard and Ainley when they flew downstairs a moment or two later. But it was Wivvle who had given her the sweet peas. He had found time to think of them and be punctual for dinner; even though his dressing had been interrupted.

Jim's first meal at Warren Manor was one of the worst hours of his life. Every instant of it was a fresh danger and a fresh pain.

The mere eating of it shocked and paralysed him. It was so complicated a performance; and nobody ate as he was accustomed to eat.

Arthur had warned him never to be in a hurry, and to watch what other people did. But it was very difficult to copy grace when you had only clumsiness to do it with.

And it wasn't only the eating. The talk flowed on all round him like a foreign language; the words were sometimes familiar but the sense perpetually escaped him. They all spoke so quickly and none of them ever repeated what they said and they didn't stick to anything.

If they began with a cricket match they were apt to end with vegetarianism or politics, and it was impossible to grasp from the clipped allusions what they really thought about any of these subjects.

What was vegetarianism, for instance? Mr. Bligh announced that he was trying it and found it wonderfully clarifying; like cold water at dawn, he explained.

Jim had fallen once into a canal at dawn, and he thought if vegetarianism was really like that excessively startling plunge he would most certainly—as soon as he found out what it was—avoid it. But by the time he had summoned courage to ask, Mr. Bligh had pounced on to the Prime Minister and was using language about him which was positively shocking. Mrs. Bligh said gently—apparently of the

Government at large—'Yes, those dreadful men——' and wanted in the same breath to know who had won at tennis.

This produced a perfect nightmare of untranslatable banter between the boys, banter of a stiff, intellectual kind without oaths and with a strange lack of point. Jim was used to sparring matches of wit and came off extremely well in them—river repartee is a test of wit—but he wouldn't have liked to risk a specimen before Mrs. Bligh.

Every one laughed at almost nothing, and they laughed nearly all the time.

Jim rarely laughed; he could see and perpetrate the best jokes unsmilingly, and it made his cheeks ache to keep a responsive smile to the inexplicable mirth around him.

Mrs. Bligh spoke to him twice. Once she said,—

'Are you fond of gardening?'

(They all had a way of speaking as if you could be fond of anything you liked, quite as if you had had the opportunity to find out.) Jim said he liked a flower or two, and later on she asked if he could swim, and he said, 'A tidy bit.' The rest of the time she left him alone, but there was in her way of doing it a certain protective effect, as if she held a light screen of friendliness between him and solitude.

Mr. Bligh talked without discrimination to the table at large. It was true he fixed the name of each boy in turn on to a passing topic, but there was nothing less casual or more personal in his speech than the pause of a bird on a twig.

The meal, which was very pleasant and unhurried, lasted three-quarters of an hour.

Wivvle was the only boy who spoke directly to Jim, and then it was only to ask him to pass the salt, but he did it so charmingly that it seemed to Jim—who spilled a little salt in passing it—to constitute a tie.

After dinner every one went out of the door as if there was a rule about it—not the nearest person first, as would have been natural.

Mr. Bligh held Jim rather firmly by the shoulder, and in the end they went out of the door together after all the others.

'Now, my dear boy,' Mr. Bligh said, 'we'll come into the study and have a go at you. What I must get at now, you know, is what the French call the bottom of your thoughts.

You must learn French one of these days—charming language—charming people—marvellous polish of manner. We are rough barbarians as compared to the Latin races, and yet, you know, there's something about us—I hope you won't think me insular—but I rather think there *is* something about us—more genuinely polite? We put ourselves out more—though, of course, we don't express ourselves nearly so well.

'Now, if you'll just come in here—— You smoke, don't you? I always encourage our boys to have cigarettes after meals. Why not? At seventeen or eighteen you have your growth—and I have a theory that what people do naturally and without suppression they do in moderation. Now we'll come to business.'

To Jim's surprise they really did come to business. He had not supposed that they would; he had expected instruction from his arrival on the railway; but for five hours his expectation had been increasingly baffled.

But it was not the will-o'-the-wisp it had seemed. Mr Bligh was a conscientious scholar and an excellent instructor. In half an hour he had reached the depth of Jim's ignorance and saw before him the extent of his task.

Jim had had a first-rate elementary education and had made very fair progress in a secondary one. He had added to this foundation by indiscriminate reading and occasional hours of study with a finished scholar. He knew some Latin and was well grounded in mathematics and history.

What he knew he knew with the unflurried thoroughness of a mind which has no chance thoughts, and no desire to evade facts. He could express what he had learned simply and directly. He understood more grammar than he had ever practised.

When he had finished his examination, Mr. Bligh leaned back thoughtfully.

'You'll have a great opportunity,' he said more gravely than he usually spoke.

'I hope you'll have a great future. I have never seen a mind get its chance as yours has done, with so little—so little intervention of culture. You won't object to my speaking plainly, will you?

'I think we must have a little intervention of culture; I do really.

'The best way is for it to filter down naturally, as I always say from class to class.

'We each have much to learn from the other. Now, honour, you know; honour and absolute truthfulness, high-mindedness, the old code of the perfect knight—that's all good breeding, you know—but it can be acquired—it's what I should like to see open to any man as well as knowledge.

'I should recommend you to study Wivvle. The other boys have it too—Pritchard belongs to an excellent family, and Ainley's father had culture as well as brains, but he doesn't go very far back.

'But Wivvle! There he is. You can rely on him—our best type—in a sense without disparaging labour, you understand—of an Englishman. His word is a rock; his mind is clean. You can see for yourself his manners—and he's a *nice* boy—the sort you can trust through and through in every relation of life.

'I like to think all my boys are straight. I've kept a good tone here, but I don't talk much about it.

'I give them eugenics to study and I leave 'em alone. Influence—that's everything, isn't it? The influence—I don't want to boast of it—but the influence of a perfectly happy married life must carry a certain weight, mustn't it?

'I sha'n't say much to you either, Barton, but I know you've had a different start from the rest of them—— There are just one or two things I had better put before you. I'm perfectly modern, you know—open minded—and nature, you know—I always allow for nature.'

Mr. Bligh looked vainly round the room. He made this statement in perfectly good faith, but he never *had* allowed for nature; it always took him by surprise.

Then he put one or two things before Jim. The boy sat opposite to him with his head down.

What Mr. Bligh proceeded to say struck Jim as increasingly childish.

Memories of the life of the streets and of the subterreanean viciousness of the penitentiary passed through his mind. It

was all silly truck. Mr. Bligh was right about Latin and French, but he didn't know what he was talking about now.

Wivvle and Emily—what kind of honour was that? What kind of truthfulness? Perfect in every relation in life. Then he ought not to go round giving sweet peas to ladies who believed in him.

Jim might be ignorant, but he knew enough to know that people like Mrs. Bligh wouldn't take sweet peas from boys who kissed their housemaids. And all the rest of the stuff—morality—it wasn't a thing off the line of housemaids, but Mr. Bligh spoke as if it were. It didn't do any good to talk about it, unless, so to speak, the housemaid was there too; even then it probably wouldn't do any good to talk about it.

The point was, Jim was there for other things—these liabilities were Jim's business to put down; he knew he had them; he never ignored liabilities; but if he didn't put them down he was a fool. They weren't Mr. Bligh's business.

He looked up suddenly at Mr. Bligh and cut across his carefully veiled phrases.

'All right, sir,' he said with smouldering eyes, 'you needn't ter worry. I'm not 'ere fer all that.'

It pulled Mr. Bligh up short. He was a wise and tactful person in his dealings with boys, and he wasn't accustomed to being pulled up short; but when his eyes met the fierce blue ones looking into his with so much steadiness and with such a quiet mastery of the powers of life, his own eyes shifted and fell before them.

Mr. Bligh did not know that he was a weak man trying to teach a strong man things that he had never fully learned himself, but he did feel curiously certain that he mustn't say any more.

He suggested rather lamely that Jim should have another cigarette in the garden before turning in; and then he wondered, in his ignorance of life, if Jim wasn't rather a dangerous boy to have in the house.

Jim walked out alone on to the darkening lawn.

It was a still night; a small crescent moon, misty as if it had been dipped in milk, leaned over a group of slender silver-birches. The sky was a pale blue shading into darkness.

Jim's slow mind gripped his thought. Here he was in this

strange scene to learn out of education what would help him to live—to live, and to beat down cages. He wanted, with a tightening of the heart, for all the world to learn to live—for the weak to live more easily and the strong more justly.

He did not want to stop at books; he wanted an honour that would transcend codes and a truth that would be safe for the weak to trust to. He did not know what powers were against him, but he knew what he held in his heart. The cry of a nightingale broke upon the still night air, high and shrill with a piercing sweetness.

Behind the carved magnolia buds he saw the flutter of a woman's dress, and then Mrs. Bligh's face—it might have been, he thought, made out of one of those firm, smooth flowers. She smiled at him with her finger on her lips.

Again and again the shrill, cool sweetness of the bird's song shook the night. As they listened to it together, the intensity of his task flashed upon Jim. The contrast between what this woman knew and what he had still to learn drove the blood back from his heart. He felt, as he had not felt before Mr. Bligh, curiously humbled and at her mercy.

She did not seem like a woman to him; she was an emanation of music and moonlight. He never, then or afterward, saw her in any other way. She had no age for him, and if she had sex it was as Eve, the mother of all living, has it, with the deep sacredness of creation in her eyes.

The song ceased abruptly. Mrs. Bligh moved a little nearer to him.

'You have been talking to my husband,' she said gently. 'I know you are going to have a hard time. I wanted to tell you, if you will not think me impertinent, that I feel quite sure you will do well, in spite of the hardness. Sometimes I know——' she paused a little as if she drew her words out of some deep and difficult personal experience—'sometimes I know that to be believed in, helps a little.'

Jim looked at her. He had no words to give her the fulness of his thanks. She took the unmasked adoration of his eyes without a change in her mild serenity.

'I wondered,' she said, 'if you would care to have an extra lesson with me between six and seven every day? My husband thought perhaps you might. A lesson in how to talk as we

do. It's not so very difficult——' She gave a little apologetic laugh.

'It's just,' she said, 'a trick like any other, but it might make things more comfortable for you while you are with us.'

But though Jim could express what he knew to Mr. Bligh in spite of being tortured by how little it was, he could express nothing of what he felt to her, though it enlarged his heart to feel it—nothing in words; his eloquent, dumb eyes said more.

'I don' mind if I do,' he muttered, and turned hastily away from her.

CHAPTER XIII

IT was curiously unpleasant to Jim to sleep between cool linen sheets with embroidered edges and to wake to a fresh panic on the subject of Emily bitterly bringing him hot water at seven.

His night had been unrefreshed and full of dreams; it occurred to him at about four o'clock in the morning that he had better give it all up and creep out into the friendly morning, back to his barge before the skipper had time to find another boy.

Was any goal worth such tortures of humiliation and uncertainty? Then a spasm of rage shook him. Why should he be at the mercy of things that happened—why couldn't he, with all the strength that was in him, happen to the things? What people think, matters only if you yield to them. To run away from them was like giving in to being drowned.

He dressed slowly with a kind of cautious defiance and went down to breakfast, but there was no breakfast, though it was already eight o'clock. He broke into the vexed finishings of housemaids and hurried out of a French window across the lawn.

The garden, at least, needed no preparation for the day. Nobody was doing anything to it. A slight mist hung about the trees, and the lawn was white as frost with early dew.

At half-past eight he heard the gate click, and looking up he saw Mrs. Bligh coming into the garden from the road with a curious, rapt look in her face, as if she had been reinforced from another world. She smiled when she saw him; even before Jim knew where she had been he wondered at the air she had, of fresh, spiritual intensity.

When he learned that she had been to church, he wondered still more what she had found there.

Two little girls who had not appeared before came down to breakfast.

Their hair was very long and glossy—gold with a hint of red in it; their skirts were very short and their legs very slim. They had eyes of a serene blue which shone with all the weighty gravity of a kitten's. Dora had a charming tip-tilted nose and Mabel had a charming straight one, and they both behaved formidably well.

They sat one on each side of their mother, and neither of them swung their legs or lifted their voices; their small hands moved with deftness and despatch; all their wants were unobtrusively supplied, and they had the ease of children confident of their own behaviour. From time to time they gravely studied the appearance of the new boy. They had been told by nurse that in some strange way he was different from the other three. He was a vulgar boy.

They suspected that the word vulgar meant something that went off with a bang when you least expected it. Something that nobody nice ever was.

Denis, with the glaring want of judgment common to his sex had stated that he liked 'vulgar' people. They were more fun. But then Denis liked pigs being killed and neither of his sisters did.

They made up their minds not to like Jim before they saw him, and as they equably ate their well-tapped boiled eggs, they decided with one straight look of interchanging confidence that they would keep to this decision.

Nobody, not even Jim, knew what he was going to do next with his knife.

They did not dream that they stood to Jim much as two angels off a Christmas card miraculously turned in to life.

Eliza at their age had known a great deal more than Eve. Dora and Mabel hardly had any individuality; they were like two small buds shaken by the wind against a mother rose!

All three of her children were a part of Mrs. Bligh; they flowed toward her and away from her like ripples borne on the smooth surface of a stream. She controlled them without visible effort.

When her children were with her she was like a lamp lit from within; and when they were withdrawn from her the light in her sank. It never wholly left her, but it seemed withdrawn into a secret shrine.

None of her children had even seen her angry or in a hurry, or preoccupied by her own concerns. She always spoke to them slowly, with her whole attention fixed on them, and she never changed her mind or broke her promises.

Nevertheless, if she became grave they trembled; her silent displeasure haunted their whole consciousness—they could not rest until they had obtained her forgiveness.

Mr. Bligh was merely an excitable outside element to his children—they could shut him out as you shut out a shower of rain and wind.

He was not formidable, and often if you disobeyed him he forgot; and when he said things were going to happen they didn't. Their mother let them come to her all day long, and at night they said their prayers to her and she sat on their beds and sang to them, looking wonderfully like a fairy queen.

They hoped she was not so old that she couldn't live till they grew up. She knew all about their fears at night, and crossed their foreheads before she kissed them, and left them with a candle and with a wonderful reinforcement of an invisible guardian angel to back it. Relentlessly and tirelessly Mrs. Bligh gave her children all they needed; except the power of doing without her.

They had hardly any initiative, and when Denis developed it he could see by his mother's eye that he was being naughty.

But to Jim's dazzled mind there was no flaw in a system which presented itself as all sympathy, happiness and affection. He had never seen people making each other's happiness before, as if happiness was a pursuit. He supposed that you would have to be rather clean and well-off to do it. His mother had never thought of such a thing; it was as much as she could do to get them off to school in the morning.

Mr. Bligh was preoccupied at breakfast, and he barely threw Jim a word of explanation before he bounded off to his study to start his socialist lecture on the Holy Land.

Apparently there was no violent hurry about work. The library was indicated to Jim by a wave of the hand, and it was there that he found himself for the first time alone with the other three boys.

There was a perceptible pause as Jim came into the room. He hesitated and looked about him, wondering where he could

least conspicuously go. Everything looked wonderfully handsome for a schoolroom, and as if you had to be careful about ink.

None of the boys turned as he entered, but a perceptible stiffness passed over them.

They did not set upon him as village dogs hurled themselves upon the alien Cadger; they left him alone; but it was just as much a fight.

In haughty silence they took their seats at separate tables, and, as those born out of due time, they set to work. Jim observed them each in turn; then he addressed himself to Wivvle, who looked the least inaccessible of the three, and asked him what he had better be at.

Wivvle, without turning his head, replied,—

'Oh, can't you find out for yourself?'

Wivvle was never able to resist being charming when there was no one present to think the worse of him for it; but he couldn't afford to be charming now, under the condemnation of the other boys.

Their plan of ostracism had only come to them overnight, for they had been open-minded on the subject of Jim as long as he wasn't there.

Wivvle had been distinctly sympathetic, and Ainley had said the whole thing, if well worked, might prove rather a lark; only Pritchard had obstinately shaken his head from the first, and said, 'Poor people ought to be kept in their places'; but even he seemed to think you might be nice to them if they stayed there. What had changed their attitude was that Jim wasn't ridiculous enough.

In spite of his accent, his grammar, and his incredible clumsiness, he was not a joke. For one thing he was a great deal more grown up than they were; if he hadn't shaved, however badly, he would have had a beard; and he was independent. Not with the well-bred independence that knows its way about and can't make social mistakes, but with that rough-and-ready independence which can stand on its own feet in a rough-and-ready world. Independence is never funny; it is not submissive enough to be readily played with, and it is not at the mercy of other people's ideas.

They had recognised instantly, when they saw Jim, that it

mattered less what they thought of him than they had expected. With all their enormous advantages they were not nearly so tough.

Instinctively it roused their antagonism to feel that they might not be able to take the stuffing out of a barge boy.

They were not in the least consciously cruel; they were all three a little lazy, a little selfish, a little corrupt; but, on the whole, they were quite normal boys of eighteen. They had the usual possibilities in them of heroism and generosity, but they were unmade and spiritually raw. What they were capable of was as uncertain as which way the cat jumps; and the boy before them was already made.

Accidents could cripple or mutilate him, but they couldn't deflect him by a hair's breadth from the iron mould into which destiny and his own will had formed his character. For good or evil he would, in twenty years' time, be the same kind of person as the man who stood before them now; and in twenty years' time they would be what the path of least resistance had made them.

Jim waited for a moment after receiving Wivvle's rebuff. He looked at each of them in turn. Wivvle flinched and fiddled with a fountain pen. Pritchard, with unnatural concentration, turned over the leaves of a Greek history. Ainley stuck a single eyeglass in his eye and contemplated with an appearance of detachment a rose-spray tapping against the window.

Pritchard disliked Jim as a class; Wivvle didn't dislike him at all; Ainly disliked him as an individual; and his position was therefore the strongest. Jim's eyes fell on him last with a kind of dumb, deliberate meaning. This was the one who ought to have had more sense; but he hadn't.

It was odd that these admirably equipped boys should resent Jim. They had all the things he hadn't; they were well-bred, and as easy with life as if it were an old shoe. Everything was open to them; most things were obtainable.

They could afford to be ill and go away to the seaside afterward; they lived like the lilies of the field, without resorting to any kind of mechanical work to supply their glory, and yet Jim did not feel any resentment against them. They were welcome to all their advantages. Of course they knew

a lot of things he didn't, but he was going to learn, and he wouldn't take anything away from them by learning; he was only going to see what was in his head.

He fixed his eyes on Ainley with that curious lack of diffidence which they had already noticed.

'Look a-here,' he demanded brusquely, 'what's the matter wiv me anyway?'

It was the point at issue.

Wivvle jerked his pen so sharply that a drop of ink fell on his immaculate shirt-cuff. Ainley's eyeglass—he was only just learning how to carry it—popped out of his eye like an over-ripe gooseberry. Pritchard breathed heavily into his Grecian history.

Jim's question was barbaric and unexpected; it struck at the root of the matter, and no one likes being asked questions which strike at roots.

Ainley was the first to pull himself together. He reinserted his eyeglass with care and spoke in a studied drawl.

'Well,' he said, 'if you really want to know, you aren't particularly the kind of person with whom we are accustomed to associate.'

Wivvle gave a curious sigh of relief, as if his mind had found shelter behind a screen of words.

'Wot of it?' asked Jim. 'It ain't my fault, is it? I'd just as lief know you as not!'

Wivvle smiled, and then bit his lip and frowned.

'That isn't exactly my meaning,' Ainley replied, preserving his air of exaggerated courtesy. 'It is very kind of you to say you have no objection to making our acquaintance, but you see unfortunately the objection lies on our side, and, I regret to say, I fear it is insuperable. We don't like having to associate with you.'

'Oh, all right,' said Jim casually; 'there don't seem much sense in it as seemingly we've all got ter. But if that's the way it is—I don't mind keeping myself to myself to oblige you. I did fink as 'ow Mr. Bligh said we was all man to man like, but I reckon you none of yer ain't men yet—and happen he only meant himself and me.'

The outrageousness of this assertion dashed even Ainley,

but it brought Wivvle most astoundingly out upon the other side. He leaned forward suddenly with his charming smile.

'You've never been to a public school, have you?' he asked Jim. 'No—I thought not. If you had been, you'd understand that a newcomer has to learn to stand on his own feet. You mustn't think we're your natural enemies—but on the other hand we aren't particularly naturally your friends. If I were you, I'd go slow and look about me.

'I think you asked me about your work just now, and I'm afraid I answered you a little shortly. We all work on our own lines here, but Mr. Bligh said last night that you'd find books in the drawer on your right. You'd better have a look at them, perhaps.'

Afterward Wivvle explained that he couldn't do anything else. He was awfully sorry to have upset their plan and gone back on Ainley, but Jim had made him feel such a damned snob he couldn't stand it.

Pritchard accepted this explanation; he had a great respect for Wivvle, not only because his father was a baronet and his first cousin an earl, but because everything about him—including his tennis rackets and his ties—was so perfectly all right.

Of course a man in his position couldn't afford for an instant to feel like a snob. Even Ainley, though he was naturally more annoyed, bore Wivvle no grudge. Curiously enough, it was Jim who most resented Wivvle's sudden change of front.

''E didn't oughter 'ave done that,' he said to himself. ''E oughter 'ave stuck by the uvvers.'

But Jim was not aware that a man like Wivvle can die, or betray, or even kill, rather than appear at a social disadvantage.

CHAPTER XIV

IT was one of Jim's greatest puzzles—accustomed as he was to outbursts of tyranny, or the sharp expression of tortured nerves, forced from human beings by the pressure of work and the absence of privacy—to see the way in which people at Warren Manor kept their tempers.

He missed the skipper's expletives; and he was conscious of his own streak of bad temper, like something moving about wild and dissatisfied inside him. He was like a hard-shelled crab in the society of soft ones.

To be rough-tongued at Warren Manor was considered bad manners, and when Jim spoke his mind he was not holding his own as he had always supposed, but he was rudely shaking the social ease which hung about them all like sunshine.

Jim was not very sensitive himself—it was not easy to hurt him; but when he was hurt, he was hurt deeply. These people, on the contrary, seemed extremely sensitive. He often saw by their pained glances that he had struck one of the hidden rocks of their submerged dislikes, though they weren't hurt very much; if they had been hurt very much their dislikes would have remained submerged. As to their religion—and Jim at once set himself to discover it—there seemed nothing which they were more determined to hide. Only Mr. Bligh professed his with perpetual outspokenness, and Jim decided after a month's study that Mr. Bligh's religion was an imaginary affair. He was an ardent socialist, but he had never altered any of his habits for his creed. Mr. Bligh had his meals, his servants, his luxuries, precisely as if no passion for general sharing had ever shaken his soul. Mrs. Bligh went to church every morning at eight o'clock and three times on Sundays, but she never mentioned anything about it. She kept her secret source of life as private as if it had been a disgrace.

Of course all three of the boys belonged to the Church of

England—or would have said so if you had asked them. They went to church when they had to. But that was not their real creed.

Ainley's religion was success. Every nerve of his being responded to that stimulus only. He was so ambitious that he never spoke of it. All day long his mind was preoccupied with the great shipping interests of his father, into which he hoped to pass. Huge schemes of business adventure kept him awake at night. He studied with a conscientious fervour, over which he spread a kind of indolent banter; but the banter was his only indolence. Ainley's God was power, and there is no harder master.

Pritchard worshipped form. To be exactly like a certain small and select herd of people, who never thought too much, felt too deeply, or made any flagrant social mistakes, absorbed his entire vision. He had the type of nature which exults in following a flock of sheep through a gap in a hedge; he would have preferred a path with a lion in it to straying over an open space.

Jim had seen the same type of mind in men of his own class, men who followed their unions without even attempting to understand their leaders' reasons. Of all powerful human instincts probably that of the herd is hardest to break. The centre of the herd instinct is panic acting upon stupidity. Only those who are content to stand alone can preserve the race courage and mercy for the race.

But Pritchard differed from the type of working men Jim knew, because he was less independent. If you are near enough to reality to be a prey to accident, you can not always resemble other people, because accidents prevent uniformity. Pritchard was padded from reality.

It would have pierced him to the heart to wear the wrong kind of tie, but nothing else was at all likely to pierce him.

Wivvle's religion was the most frank; he wasn't in the least afraid of being pagan, and he would have granted immediately that, on the whole, what he most believed in was doing what he liked.

Wivvle was a more bewildering character to Jim's awakening mind than either of the other two boys, and he was a great deal more attractive.

Neither Pritchard nor Ainley changed their attitude toward Jim. Pritchard always disliked him as a class, and Ainley resented him as a person. But Wivvle was intermittently friendly.

He couldn't be Jim's champion because it was too much bother, but he couldn't be a brute because being a brute was almost more of a bother than being a champion.

Wivvle noticed Jim only when there was no one else to notice; but when he was aware of him he gave him a flattering amount of his confidence.

He behaved as if Jim were his intimate friend, and spoke to him with a slangy nonchalance which took no account of any difference between them, unless indeed the differences were superiorities on the part of Jim. Wivvle acknowledged Jim's superiorities very handsomely, and profited by them. Jim could work, and Wivvle wouldn't. He really wanted to get into the army, if it wasn't too much of a grind, and by helping to make awkward problems easy for him Jim became a slight convenience to Wivvle.

It is difficult to say what Wivvle became to Jim, because Jim had no standard of comparison. He did not know what a friend of his own age was like. Boys in the penitentiary had confederates, not friends, and those Jim had met on the river he had usually fought, either with his fists or his tongue or both. Wivvle smiled at him, chaffed him—and let him run his errands.

If the opportunity had occurred Jim would have died for Wivvle, but he didn't altogether respect him.

Wivvle was not what Jim wanted to be like. He had no firmness in him, and he took what he wanted and never paid for it. He was so much accustomed to the untaxed gifts of the gods—his good looks and his general fascination, his independence of means and the ease of his social position—that it never occurred to him to take any trouble for his friends.

He broke engagements whenever it suited him, and he took for granted a continual series of services which he would never have dreamed of reciprocating.

Nobody ever asked Wivvle to post their letters, buy their stamps, or exercise their bull terriers; but every one took it as a matter of course that these little services should be per-

formed for Wivvle. He could appear late for meals and be as untidy as a wind in a wood, but housemaids only smiled, and housekeepers raised tolerant eyebrows.

Jim's clear eyes, unobscured by his deepening affection, saw that Wivvle's carelessness was selfishness, and that half his charm was due to his inability to face anything uncomfortable. To save the *amour propre* of his friends, he would risk their security. But Jim preserved a belief in Wivvle's curious honour.

Somewhere or other, he was certain, his friend *was* a hero. You couldn't, Jim reflected, be a hero all round, but you could be one in a flash, when the pinch came. Jim felt sure that some day he should see the gleam of a sword drawn out of its scabbard, and Wivvle earning for himself an imperishable glory.

Wivvle did not give Jim all his confidence, but he liked talking about his difficulties to Jim; it seemed, in a way, to solve them, and he had a great many difficulties. His people were extraordinarily stupid about his allowance, and then there were Jews and mysterious men on the turf, born solely to irritate and confuse Wivvle because he didn't like accounts, and naturally had to bet on horses. His worst bother was what would happen if he didn't pass for Sandhurst.

'My people will mind,' Wivvle would say, wrinkling his charming chestnut eyebrows and looking for a moment like a butterfly at bay; but butterflies seldom remained at bay. Wivvle's casual wings let him through in a moment into wider air. It was Jim who remembered permanently that Wivvle's people would mind.

It did not occur to Jim to tell Wivvle of his own difficulties, even if there had ever been time for them in their haphazard moments of confidence between the importances of games; but there never was any time.

Jim's difficulties were very much his own affair, and didn't concern other people.

He had to live through black and heavy hours when the work of the day was over and the next day lay before him colourless and blind—heavy with the unaccomplished. At these moments every little baffling disaster of the day, his

awkward speech his small social blunders, rose up and tortured him.

He would not have felt them so unbearable but for the loneliness. On the barge he had always had Cadger and the river. The skipper was not a talker, but he smoked, spat and grunted in a companionable way—it was not like sitting on the edge of a chair by your window and hearing other people laughing in the garden.

Jim generally stayed on the edge of his chair, because if he went out the laughter stopped.

Mr. and Mrs. Bligh sometimes made him come, and that was worse—what he wanted was to be with the other boys, and for everybody to go on talking just the same.

One evening, when Jim knew the Blighs were dining out, the longing for companionship became too strong for him. The boys were just below him in the dark; they were strolling about on the lawn, lighting cigarettes and letting them go out again in the interest of their holiday experiences.

Jim had had no summer holidays; he had gripped his task unrelentingly. But it struck him now that to hear about their experiences would be a kind of a holiday.

After all, Wivvle was Jim's friend; he wouldn't let the other fellows shut him out completely. Perhaps they would be nice to him—it was quite a long time since he had dropped any of his *h's.*

Jim flung aside his books and ran downstairs to join them.

Wivvle was telling the other two that he knew 'a delicious little dream' who danced at the Gaiety, 'a most ripping little kid with her hair down her back, but there wasn't much she wasn't on to.' He offered to introduce Ainley and Pritchard to this delectable vision but his invitation stopped at Jim. You couldn't very well ask a 'delicious little dream' to meet a boy off a barge.

Jim was brought up short by the hedge of their evasive manners. He wanted to ask them to go on talking about the 'delicious little dream' but he couldn't find words for it.

Wivvle didn't stop talking, but he switched the subject off on to an obvious makeshift. The interest of all of them died down into pauses.

Jim felt a wave of rage pass over him.

He did not want to slip back into games and chaff; he wanted to talk, as they had been talking before he came, about their real pursuits. He wanted particularly to know what these other men thought about women. He did not realise that it was precisely on this subject that none of the three would ever communicate their thoughts to him. You could talk only to your own sort about what concerned you most.

Jim felt his physical strength stand out in him like the exaggerated muscles of one of Canova's athletes. His body responded to the sharp rebellion of his mind; a savage instinct rose in him to use his physical power against them.

If they wouldn't allow him ordinary companionship why shouldn't he show them who was after all the better man?

Jim had made no study of scientific fighting, and all the other three were proficient in it, but he counted on his strength.

It was Ainley's single eyeglass which most infuriated Jim; but he held his fury back, and looked at Wivvle. If he could have a word or a glance from his friend half his anger would drop, for half his anger was jealousy.

But Wivvle withheld his conciliatory power. Jim was out of place, and Wivvle never helped people to get into places when they were out of them.

Jim took a few steps with the others in sullen silence. Then Ainley said in his careless, impertinent drawl,—

'I say, you two fellows, would you like a cigarette in my room? We can talk in peace there.'

And Pritchard said quickly,—

'I was just thinking it would be rather jolly.'

Wivvle did not say anything, but he turned his step toward the house with the others.

The blood rushed to Jim's head. He was as conscious of his anger as if it were some animal behind bars trying to get out. He spoke thickly and in jerks.

'By God,' he said, turning to face them. 'I've had enough of this! I've had enough of this!'

'It's curious,' said Ainley in a light, bantering voice, 'how fond people of the lower classes are of repetition; especially as one fails to see anything at all profound in their remarks.'

Pritchard giggled weakly.

Jim struck at Ainley automatically, as if his mind had abandoned volition.

'Hullo, you two chaps!' Pritchard cried, aghast, and then seemed to melt away into the darkness.

Wivvle said quietly,—

'Let them fight it out—why not?'

Ainley returned Jim's blow with interest; his eyeglass was off, and he set his mind on the fight with cool intensity.

The man in front of him was simply a savage, and Ainley trusted implicitly in his superior science.

Perhaps he trusted too much in his expertness; or perhaps that strange, blind rage of Jim's could have broken through any expert's guards; but from the first Ainley stood no chance, except of defence. He warded off Jim's first attempt to close with him, but Jim came on again like a bull in a series of blind, formidable, frontal attacks, disregarding any check.

Jim was conscious that Ainley saved himself repeatedly, and that his light strokes got home, here and there; but his blows might have been the taps of a child for all Jim noticed them.

He felt no sensation at all beyond his rage. He was lost in his anger, as men are lost in love, or when fear has pierced them to the core. In these wild, breathless minutes one of his terrible blows got home.

Ainley reeled backward, caught feebly at the air as if it were something he could hold on to, and crumpled up in a heap on the lawn.

For a moment nothing stirred; then Pritchard screamed,—

'By God—you brute—you've killed him!'

Pritchard had come back again with a contorted face like a doll's, and stood shakily in a patch of moonlight. Nobody took any notice of him. Wivvle knelt down over Ainley's body and felt for his heart.

Jim stood still; he heard Pritchard say, 'Murderer,' and saw him walk rapidly out of the patch of moonlight toward the house.

It had suddenly occurred to Pritchard that this was the usual thing to do.

The word 'murderer' came to Jim as if it had travelled from

a long way off, and rang on in his mind like the reverberation of a bell.

'Murderer'—surely he had heard it before—the whole thing had happened before—or was it still happening?—and was the rest of life blotted out, and nothing left but a figure lying in front of him with the soul knocked out of it by his hand?

The moon rose slowly behind the trees; the patch on the lawn widened till the whole garden was flooded with pale clear light. Jim was not hot any more; he felt curiously relieved physically, as if a weight had been taken off him. But he wasn't quite sure what he had done. He tried to speak, but his throat was dry, and he found he could not swallow.

Ainley, that lover of power, looked a very frail and little thing lying there quite still on the grass. Jim found himself feeling very sorry for him, because Ainley had mattered, and now he didn't matter any more.

Wivvle looked up at Jim reassuringly.

'It's all right, old man,' he said; 'I can feel his heart now. You only knocked the wind clean out of him. But by Jove! You went at it like a madman. You'd kill a fellow as like as not with that style of fighting.'

Jim began to shake with relief. He had not known he was anxious before, but relief was terrible. He wanted to shout out loud and cry like a child.

'Gawd!' he muttered, falling back in his old habits of speech. 'I fought I'd done 'im in! Like my father—I knocked the life out of 'im—as you might out of a cat! And I didn't mean for to do it. It's so damned easy to 'it too 'ard!'

Wivvle glanced up again horrified.

'My dear old chap, you're out of your head!' he said quickly. 'Killed your father?'

Jim looked gloomily down at him.

'Yus,' he said. 'You can give me away if yer like. Parson said as 'ow I wasn't ter say nuffin about it. I served three years for it—but that don't seem ter make no difference. Like as not I'd have swung for this!'

Wivvle straightened himself up.

'Hold your tongue about it anyway, now,' he said under

his breath. 'I've told you before—you don't give people away. Ainley's coming round. You all right, old man?'

Ainley smiled feebly.

Mrs. Bligh spoke close to them; very quietly, as if someone had only dropped a thimble.

'I am so sorry,' she said gently, 'to hear that there has been an accident. Is he badly hurt? No? Then help him in, will you? Drink this brandy first, Mr. Ainley. I will stay out here and talk to you, Mr. Barton. He must lie on the sofa till I come in, and then I will see if it is necessary to send for the doctor.'

'I had no idea you were in,' Wivvle said remorsefully. 'What an ass Pritchard was to bother you!'

'No one is going to be bothered,' said Mrs. Bligh, putting her firm, small hand under Ainley's elbow.

Ainley rose painfully to his feet; he looked as if he might collapse again at any moment; but he was a plucky fellow, and, refusing any help but Wivvle's, staggered back into the house.

Jim hardly dared to look at Mrs. Bligh. What would she say to him now they were alone?

She hated violence, and he had done what she hated.

For a time she said nothing. She was dressed for her dinner party in a filmy gray dress—everything about her was soft and gleamed.

She moved to a seat and motioned to Jim to sit down beside her.

'I think you had better tell me how it happened,' she said at last.

She showed neither anger nor disgust; but there was an arrest of friendliness in her voice as if she had suspended feeling until after she had judged.

Jim gave her the bare facts; he told her what he had said, and what Ainley had said. He did not say what he had felt.

'Then I hit him,' he finished shamefacedly. 'It seemed as if I had to hit him.'

Mrs. Bligh's silence robbed his action of all sgnificance. He saw now that he hadn't proved anything by hitting Ainley, except that he couldn't control his own temper.

'You haven't told me why you did it?' she said after a pause. 'I think there is something more, something in your mind—isn't there?—which made you feel upset. Perhaps you were lonely?'

Jim hesitated. Should he tell her about his hours of darkness; would she understand the cramping temptations of his lonely youth? He could not see her eyes, and her voice still withheld its personal kindliness.

But some barrier had broken down in Jim. He knew he could tell her everything now. It was that moment in a man's life when he has for one woman the stored-up completed confidence of all his years. He moved a little so that the pale light rested on his torturd face.

'It's a pull,' he said at last slowly, 'being alone, and with people different like. Seems as if they didn't know what was inside you—nor you what was inside them.

'I want to keep clear of things—old things that catch a hold on me sometimes; but I don't know how—I'm afraid I'll get caught out one of these days. To-night I thought if I could talk like the other fellows, I'd forget—it would ease me up inside like; and when I saw they were all against me I got sort of wild. You see, I want to keep straight—it's—it's one of the things I'd like——'

He looked at her wistfully—would she understand what he meant? That he was on his knees to her, in his heart—and that all the reverence he had never had, came to him for her sake, and gave him strength to resist temptation. Only not even this was enough—not quite enough against the awful driving force of desire. But if she understood, perhaps it would be enough.

To his surprise she made a quick movement to stop him, as if her silvery dress were too near something that might soil it. She was afraid of his sins. Mrs. Bligh had that habit of self-preservation which is fatal to all real confidence. She knew that she could not go on liking people if they were not quite nice.

'No! No!' she said hurriedly. 'You need not tell me! I understand! It is better not to speak of one's temptations. They are very terrible. I wish I could help you—but there is strength, strength enough and to spare, only we have not

got it in ourselves. God can perform miracles if we give Him the chance.'

Mrs. Bligh was eager to put Jim's troubles on to God; it would save her from any personal contact with them.

Jim listened, but he felt discouraged. He had already tried God.

'I am not a clever woman,' Mrs. Bligh went on, 'and I have no arguments to give you—I know you are fond of arguments, Jim; perhaps too fond. Faith is very simple.

'I will tell you a little about my own if it will help you?'

Jim nodded; he was still surprised that she had checked his confidence, but he was not at all hurt. He was convinced that she was too beautiful not to do right.

'I find all my strength in prayer,' Mrs. Bligh murmured. 'I pray always before I speak. I feel the Presence, the Divine Presence, on the altar of my church. I take from it every day my courage and my will to live, and every day it is new, because what is Eternal is always new.'

'But you're happy,' Jim faltered, 'and you're good. I think God made you good. You can't have any temptations.'

Mrs. Bligh did not answer. She liked Jim to think her perfect.

The moonlight shone hard on the lawn and whitened all the grass. There was a curious sense of suspension in the air, as if some secret stood close behind the pallid light in the shelter of the dark.

'Now, I wanted to kill Ainley just now,' Jim continued. 'I was hot like to get to the end of him. It was luck I didn't.'

Mrs. Bligh gave a curious little sigh as if she too understood the pressure of hate.

'You are so strong,' she said, when Jim paused, 'and strength can be so terrible if it is used against God, and so beautiful if it is used for Him. Put away all that idea of anger and killing—and even loneliness, because we are never unbefriended—use your strength for life.'

'I'd like to do that,' said Jim humbly; 'that's what I'm getting educated for—but I don't know how. I got a cruel temper.'

'The church will teach you all you need to know,' Mrs. Bligh said quickly; 'let the vicar prepare you for confirma-

tion. Confirmation means strengthening. Remember the church is very old and wise. She knows what is good for us. What does it matter if our finite minds rebel sometimes against her laws? It is your heart that guides your actions, not your mind—and laws are for the heart.'

Jim was in the mood for an immediate sacrifice. He would gladly have cut off his hand and entered the kingdom of Heaven maimed, but he was not prepared for this wholesale abdication of the intellect.

'But you got to see things clear,' he objected.

'Not always,' said Mrs. Bligh decisively, rising to her feet to end the interview.

It was Jim's initiation into the sacramental system. He bowed his head and agreed to give up seeing things clear.

CHAPTER XV

IT was a most awkward business. Ainley had a hemorrhage in the night, and for a week or two it seemed more than likely that Jim's blow had set up the old mischief in his lungs.

The house divided itself equally for and against Jim. The quarrel had been most carefully hushed up, but, of course, everybody knew all about it.

Emily was certain that she was the direct cause. She had heard her name mentioned in the laurel bushes, besides, she had reason to know that she might be the cause of many quarrels.

The cook—all the servants were against Jim—thought it merely a cold-blooded design to murder the entire household, and that her turn would come next.

Nurse said it was all 'them low papers of Mr. Bligh's, enough to turn a cat's stomach, lying about in the hall, all against the aristocracy and the clergy and what not.'

Pritchard refused to speak to Jim, even when directly addressed; he walked about on tiptoe scowling, and expected, without quite wishing, Ainley to die.

The rest of the household went out of its way to be nice to Jim. Ainley sent a message by Wivvle to say that he would have done just the same in Jim's place, and that there was nothing for anybody to be in a wax about.

It was a sporting message, but it did not make Jim feel any more comfortable; even Wivvle's, 'My dear chap, *of course* you had to fight him,' lacked the ring of finality.

Jim did not feel as if he had any such comfortable compulsion behind him. There was no sense in half killing a man because he didn't like you; and that was after all what he had done. He had acted in a passion, and the results of passion are irrelevant. They weighed on Jim's mind with the intolerable weight of outraged common sense. When

Wivvle tried to comfort him by saying that, of course, he had to defend his honour, Jim said he didn't know what his honour was, and Wivvle whistled and walked out of the room.

Mr. Bligh was appalled; he felt like the possessor of a very nice plain bottle out of which by accident he had evoked a destructive genie. His sympathies would have been entirely with Jim if Ainley hadn't been badly hurt, and entirely with Ainley if Jim hadn't been the one to hurt him. Jim had not only struck a person, he had struck a theory; and it is a very grave thing to knock down the favourite theory of any fanatic.

Mr. Bligh, in the mood of an unrelenting if benevolent judge, sent for him to his study, but when he was confronted by Jim's solid and silent figure he felt like a small trapped animal, and moved uneasily about the room fingering the corners of his book-shelves.

'I don't see how it all came about,' he murmured fretfully. 'I must get to the bottom of it, Barton; I really must. We are speaking man to man, you know, and all that, but there are certain principles in a household like this which mustn't be set at defiance.

'Violence, now! I don't believe in violence. Don't you remember my mentioning that the first time I saw you? I've always said the French Revolution went a little too far—poor Marie Antoinette, now. Carlyle spoke very nicely of her—bluntly, of course, he didn't like extravagant women—but she was a woman, even if she was a queen.

'I'm all against monarchy, especially in Europe, when it can't keep in its place. But the guillotine was too final; it was, really.

'Now, tearing down the Hyde Park railing; it looks childish, but I see a certain persuasiveness in it, and you can put up railings again. But a man's life, you know, Barton; that can't be put together again! It's destructiveness without elements of reconstruction; and Ainley is a delicate fellow, you know—he's had lung trouble——'

'I didn't know it,' said Jim sullenly. 'They told me afterwards—they might have told me before—but they never told me anything—not that lot. They never spoke to me if they

could help it. How was I to know he'd been ill—he looks twice the man that Pritchard is?'

'Dear me! Dear me!' said Mr. Bligh, distractedly running his hand through his red hair till it rose up like an inverted halo. 'I never dreamed of all this moral isolation—most unhealthy and subversive in my own house, too—I thought we all seemed so happy and comfortable together, quite a little family party; and we live quite simply, you know—we've never had a man-servant, only the gardener, and he sleeps in his own cottage in the village.

'It should have been brought to my notice sooner, you know. I could have stimulated companionship. Talked about mountain-climbing, for instance, after dinner—a little friendly repartee, once started!

'You see, everything going on at such a pace behind my back is so bewildering, and this house has been noted for never having had an acrimonious dispute—"soft words and hard arguments"—somebody or other said that—Sydney Webb, perhaps—except that now, I come to think of it, he is more weighty than epigrammatic—perhaps it was Rosetti—no, no, his favourite phrase was "fundamental brainwork,"—remember that Jim. It seems to have been lacking somewhere, doesn't it? And then you know, Barton, the essence of being a gentleman is consideration for others, isn't it?'

'I shouldn't have thought so from being here,' said Jim grimly. 'I should have thought if it had an essence, it was making people different from yourself feel as uncomfortable as possible.'

'Quite the contrary! Quite the contrary!' said Mr. Bligh, coming up short against a medical dictionary which he had got out of the shelf with some difficulty and found even harder to replace. 'And yet, of course, in a sense I see what you mean. We must allow for youth, you know, Barton—the arrogance of youth—mustn't we?

'I daresay Ainley and Pritchard hadn't quite got to the root of the matter. Wivvle, now, Wivvle appreciated the position perfectly—but the other two are more naturally reactionary. They would have come round in time, though, I think, by a process of reasoning.

'But violence, you see, Barton, doesn't conciliate—it doesn't

really. Take the militant suffragettes, burning down golf-clubs; it can't advance their cause, you know. I'm all for votes for women, of course, all labour men are; I see the childishness and selfishness of the arguments against them; but golf-clubs, you know, all the sacred feeling there is about a golf-club—well—it's embittering—I play golf myself, but they don't discriminate.

'I daresay Pritchard feels a little embittered with you, and it's that which gives him such a gloomy expression; or else he eats too much meat. I've put vegetarianism before him several times, but he doesn't seem to take to it. But Ainley now; I understand he's behaved splendidly about it all, poor chap—doesn't blame you in any way.'

'I don't care whether he does or not,' said Jim harshly. 'It isn't what anybody thinks that I care about. It wasn't sense what I did, and I've laid him out for nothing. It's that that goes against the grain with me.'

'Ah! You've grasped that point,' Mr. Bligh exclaimed with relief. I thought I could persuade you to it. Force, now, it reacts on itself. In the end force destroys force. It may destroy a person capable of reason, but it can't destroy reason, and it shouldn't be used as any kind of substitute for the intellect; it shouldn't, indeed.

'Do I take it I can tell Ainley you apologise? Of course, it's only a matter of form, but I understand you sent no answer to his message.'

'What answer was I to send?' asked Jim doubtfully. 'No! I can't say I do apologise. I'm sorry—you can tell him that if you like—that I've hurt him more than if he was the same as us, but he deserved to be hit all right. It isn't him I'm sorry for, about that, it's myself. I ought to have had more sense.'

'Of course I'm glad I've convinced you of that,' Mr. Bligh hastened to assure Jim, who had reached his own conclusion quite without any such assistance. 'But there mustn't be any grudges in the house. My wife is very anxious there shouldn't be any grudges.

'She tells me something about your wishing to be confirmed, too. Doesn't that strike you as rather reactionary and extreme? Of course I quite understand you feel remorse.

Your mind misgives you and looks about for a prop. All religions are a system of props. But remorse shouldn't go too far. Better look the other way and start afresh.'

'It's not remorse I'm after,' Jim explained with unrelenting firmness, 'nor yet looking the other way; but if I can't get on without religion I suppose I've got to have it, and I may as well try the church kind as any other.'

'There's something in what you say, of course,' said Mr. Bligh, edging rapidly toward the door. Religion is a universal instinct; I've never denied that; it's what's kept the church going so long, you know—utilised by an opportunist priesthood, but it hasn't moved, you know, not moved to speak of since the middle ages. Still, perhaps it may help you. After all, individuals evolve as slowly as nations, and this outbreak of yours, you know, now I come to think of it, though quite opposed to the feudal spirit, may have something late renaissance about it—mayn't it?

'At any rate, my dear boy, if you feel you need the church, take it. I shan't interfere with your opinions; but take it gently—don't let it carry you too far. I'll tell Ainley you're sorry. No! No! You needn't explain again—I understand perfectly what you feel—and there's Huxley now! On the shelf to the right, I think—or is it Robert Owen, or Karl Marx! No! Huxley—I should strongly recommend you to dip into Huxley; there's something so bracing and antimedieval about him.

'We've got to the bottom of it all now, haven't we—and no grudges? I think I'll just go and speak to Pritchard a moment about his gloom—it may have been those three sausages he ate for breakfast, followed up by ham. But, on the other hand, perhaps it's something I ought to probe. Of course I'm very much against anything at all like the inquisition, you know—but the policy of *"laissez faire"*—I mustn't drop too far into that, must I?'

Mr. Bligh left Jim with unmistakable relief. Jim never seemed to swallow what was being said to him easily, and his answers were often unexpected; but Pritchard was never unexpected; his answers were made in words of one syllable, and everything you said slipped off him like water off a duck's back.

CHAPTER XVI

JIM didn't take to Huxley. He went instead to the little church across the fields, half a mile away. It was a still, dim day of misty sunshine. The heaviness of the autumn air had something peaceful and grave in it, as if by its own weight it could hold back the storms of life.

The leaves hung brittle and quiet on the trees. Death rested like a dream upon the empty harvest fields.

A wild, glad feeling rose in Jim's heart which he could not understand nor tame. He had never been so conscious of his youth before; it thrilled up in him with all the ecstasy and force of unfettered instinct.

His mind was at war with his senses. He kept telling himself that he had sinned, that the result of his sin was suffering, and that another human being was lying threatened and enfeebled by his act; yet he knew that the air tasted like apples and that an unmistakable gladness lurked behind his fostered anxiety.

There were no ends in sight—he could do anything—feel anything—meet any one—the future was as hidden and as rare as the far misty hills. Youth is an awkward and baffling period—but it has moments of compensation when it transcends experience, and Jim had one of these moments now. He felt only his strength and saw none of the obstacles against which strength is broken.

The church was always open. Jim pushed back the wired door and felt the welcoming hush of the ancient sanctuary.

It had been badly restored, and love had filled it with tawdry and piteous things, but beauty lived in the solid old arches and rested on the worn and crooked stones. The church had stood for centuries and held the spirit of many prayers.

People had gone there in pain and with undreamed-of secrets; they had gone there filled with new joy and the innocence of thanksgiving; it seemed to Jim as if the spirit of

humanity lingered there still—a little baffled and a little estranged by the placid obstinacy of invisible things.

The shadows of the dwindling day darkened over the altar. There were seven cheap lamps stretched across the church, one of which was always kept burning.

Mrs. Bligh had put white chrysanthemums and late lilies in the altar vases. She had a gift for arranging flowers; it seemed to Jim as if she had made a prayer out of each lifted blossom.

She was not there, but the church was full of her presence. Jim saw in his mind's eye her small, erect figure with its lifted head and air of listening stillness.

He, too, listened, and in the silence he found prayer.

The sense of the Invisible pressed down upon him. A Presence on the cared-for altar, evoked and ministered to, responded to Jim's needs. He felt as if he had never prayed before; he let his heart rush to his lips in burning words. All that he had never said to any one, and could never say, took him by storm and made its way to God.

His hurricane angers; the weight on him of his senses; the perpetual torment of the differences between himself and others; his large desires and petty failings; his pity and his love for mankind; poured out of his heart without let or hindrance.

Time ceased; and the slow shadows crept from the altar to the door.

Jim was in a holy place, where even a man's sins are safe, if he knows that they are sins. He felt a stubborn strength in his heart rise up to meet them.

He did not hate Ainley any more; he hated still, but it was his own violence that he hated. He wanted to force his wild, spilled strength under a safe control.

Jim remembered how Arthur had once said to him,—

'The place I am sending you to is a very stiff proposition. It'll be a fight from start to finish, but there isn't time now to prepare you first. You'll have to fight your way through.'

Jim had glanced with justifiable pride at his iron fists, and reassured himself with the memory of his river conquests.

But Arthur had said quickly,—

'The fight I mean will be not to use them!'

Jim hadn't learned it yet. The humility of all strong natures shook him. He did not remember all his laborious weeks of self-control; he saw only the awfulness of his one failure.

A speck of dust in the niche of the stone column in front of him caught his eye. He thought his life had been like that—as purposeless and as fragmentary.

The unexpungeable years of his prison life weighed on him; and when he escaped from these he could not taste the joy of liberty because of Eliza.

However he tried to climb out of his past, he had Eliza fixed on his back as firmly as any Old Man of the Sea. He might keep out of prison himself; but part of him would go back to prison if Eliza went.

Crime was on his hands and in his sister's heart. He was stamped and sealed against the law. He never could feel free as Wivvle and the other boys were free.

Shame lowered his heavy head. Not even Mrs. Bligh could bear to face his sins. They came upon him remorselessly, ugly, and heavy out of the misty past, and they were in him now, for nothing breaks the continuity of sin. They were in him, but something else was in him as well—something or some one who was on his side. He had been checked, a hand had interfered between him and murder; a voice, even now in the silence about him, was working upon his anxious heart. God, who hated sin, loved sinners; had made them; put up with them, and saved them.

Religion wasn't only what you thought about God—it was what God thought about you.

You had a lot of it inside, but it came from outside as well—it was in the laughter of the sunshine as well as running in Jim's blood. It was in the winds and the woods; little children had it, and the mothers of little children—all lovers knew it, and the hour of death was hushed by its presence.

You did not have to do everything yourself, but you had to do a great deal.

If you were going to be forgiven you had to forgive; if you were going to win you had to fight; you even had to fight fighting. You had to love loving. You were forced, if you wanted to be saved, to try to save.

It wasn't enough for God to have your soul. He couldn't even begin to have it unless it was out after somebody else's. If you didn't want to be like Eliza you must help Eliza. So many things came back to Eliza. If Jim never saw her again —and he didn't see how he was going to—she was still a perpetual challenge to his faith.

Jim was so humble that he felt himself dust; but he was so alive that he knew God was in him.

Dust and God—it was what it all came down to. He could be what he liked most. He knew what instincts were and the drag of them on bewildered senses, and he had seen where instincts lead. He knew what beauty was, but he didn't know where it might lead him; he knew only that he wanted to follow wherever it led; wanted it with a thirst sharper than the thirst of all his eager passions.

He bowed his young, fierce head still lower. He had no words, but in his dumb desire to escape sin and use himself for God, he might have voiced the infrequent cry of Job,—

'Though he slay me, yet will I put my trust in God.'

It is the extremist challenge of the Christian, and it is never left unanswered.

The sun sank and a mist came up across the fields; it hung about the little church until the seven lamps and the one red light became beautiful and consolatory as the stars.

Jim still knelt, absorbed and unconscious, with a fixed heart. He had found a ladder between his soul and God.

CHAPTER XVII

IN the course of the weeks that followed, Ainley took a swift turn for the better, but not before Jim had prepared and made his first confession. It had taken him some time to grasp why he should make his confession to God before a priest, and it rather took Mrs. Bligh's breath away when he explained what finally decided him to agree to it.

'I've been thinking about it,' he said, 'and I see it's the same as playing cards for money, or what they call for love—if you don't play for money you get careless like, and I daresay it's the same confessing. Of course God listens to you, but He doesn't bring you up short like another man.'

Jim made his preparation with an unswerving thoroughness; he spent hours over self-examination; the pain of all his sins drew slow, hot tears from his eyes—the mercy and the love of God hurt him like a physical torment. When he read 'Our God is a consuming fire' he knew what it meant.

He lay awake all the night before he made his confession. He wanted to be sure he had left nothing unthought of; no corner in his stained heart unready for forgiveness.

Mrs. Bligh saw him for a moment in the garden before he went to the church. Her eyes lingered on him, full of a quickened sympathy. She had all the cold but earnest tenderness of the missionary spirit for its first convert. Jim felt as if the relationship between them moved suddenly nearer.

Mrs. Bligh did not speak to him; she lifted a late white rose toward him, but she did not touch his hand. The rose was frail and had no scent, and as she gave it to him he felt as if she had given him a symbol of her own purity.

The vicar was waiting for him in the vestry. The vicar felt a little uncomfortable. Mrs. Bligh had warned him that Jim was sure to be awkward, and from the first moment Jim was awkward. He looked at the vicar; a steady, measuring look, as if he expected something from him; then

plunged clumsily forward where he was told to kneel before the crucifix, and nearly upset the small desk on which it stood.

The vicar gave him the few introductory words and started him gently, as he had started many stammering and flurried people—for none of the penitents achieved the straightforward impersonality of the Catholic, which the vicar had always so greatly desired.

But once he had begun, Jim was unexpectedly straightforward. He transferred his awkwardness to the vicar.

It was a surprising confession to listen to. Jim gave a perfectly truthful account of the average young man's heart; and average young men's hearts are seldom communicated truthfully to their vicars.

Jim didn't always know what was wicked and what was not, but he wanted to make sure, and he never gave himself the benefit of any doubt.

Of course most young men didn't murder their fathers, but that was an accident. Jim made no bones about it; nor that he had wished to murder Ainley, and very nearly succeeded.

All his sins, potential and actual, had got to come out; the priest's eyes, as far as Jim was concerned, weren't any worse than God's.

Unfortunately they were a great deal worse. God has made sinners and has presumably to put up with them. The Rev. Anthony Brown had done nothing of the kind, and he had never had, in any serious sense, to put up with sinners, when made.

He was torn between the knowledge that what he was being told was under the seal of confession, so that he couldn't warn anybody, and the fear that a person so tempted as Jim might become dangerous if he went about in an unwarned world.

He was troubled, too, as to whether he ought to give so practised a sinner absolution. Jim had no doubt about the matter.

'I'm sorry all right,' he pointed out to the vicar, who expressed his doubt upon the subject. 'What more do you want? I've come here for it, haven't I?'

To Jim's mind the whole thing was perfectly simple. If you were sorry and confessed, you were forgiven. The Bible

and the prayer-book both plainly said so, and would have been silly if they hadn't.

He didn't see why the vicar should shilly-shally; but the vicar had shilly-shallied all his life and didn't see why he shouldn't. Still, in the end he gave in, and absolved Jim.

He was rather upset about it afterward. At the time he was frankly afraid of what Jim might do if he didn't. But he never admitted to himself that he had been afraid; he told himself that he was struck with the force of Jim's penitence.

Jim received his absolution, but he didn't get very much advice.

The vicar told him to flee from his sins, and suggested his learning several penitential psalms off by heart—but fleeing from his sins was precisely what Jim had done in coming to the vestry; and if the penitential psalms weren't more efficacious than the vicar, Jim felt that he must have come to the wrong place. The vicar hesitated, and then said that he was afraid Jim's confirmation must be postponed.

'I must be sure,' he added warily, 'of your consistent penitence.'

Jim thought that was quite natural. He wanted to be sure of it himself; but he never had been as inconsistent as most people liked.

He came to the conclusion that he wouldn't go to confession to a priest again, but that he would ask Wivvle to teach him boxing.

He found it helped him to keep his temper nearly as well as his prayers.

Mrs. Bligh gave him extra confirmation lessons on Sundays, but though he loved the sound of her voice, he sometimes found it difficult to believe all that she told him.

The superiority of even a sacramental system stuck in his throat.

'The way I look at it,' he explained to her, 'is that if we were all made by God everything is His, and every religion—that people mean—is His too. I daresay you like sacraments better, and find Him in them easier than anywhere else, but He must be wherever faith has called Him.'

This was a Protestant theory, and Mrs. Bligh said so; but 'en that didn't put Jim off it.

'I must,' he said, 'take truth where I find it. I can't believe hat I'm told unless I see the sense of it, can I?'

Mrs. Bligh explained patiently that this was exactly what : must do; he was too ignorant to find it for himself.

'Truth,' she said, 'is not what you and I think—or think e think. It is infinite and divine; only those who study the vine and have the special sacramental grace given them for at purpose, can judge what is true or not.'

Jim looked at her curiously. Suddenly his heavy mouth ok its ironic twist.

'They might feed you up with a lot of lies, that way, mightn't ey?' he questioned. 'And, anyway, parts of truth aren't vine. Some of it's right down nasty—what are you going do about that?'

Mrs. Bligh did not propose to do anything about it; she :ver had; but she smoothed the question over with her ;ual skill.

On the whole Jim's conversion went off very well. Jim :cepted a great deal that he was told and agreed that, if he dn't see it all now, he might in time. The proof of it was ie life of the woman who taught him.

He believed what made her so beautiful; he did not know at it was her beauty which made him believe it.

The confirmation service was a disappointment to Jim. He id used up his emotional force beforehand; the bishop was d, a trifle overworked, and a good deal bored.

He had given his confirmation address a great many times :fore; and he liked large congregations and rows of listen-g candidates. In the small church before him only twenty id been enlisted from five reluctant villages; and, though f course the bishop wouldn't have said so, he privately won-:red if it was worth the petrol he had used in motoring there. :e looked grave and felt cross. Unfortunately he wasn't really :ry fond of young people, though he said that he was.

Jim listened to him for a few moments with a concentra-on as powerful as collected electricity—then he turned his :tention completely off him.

Mrs. Bligh had told him that it was the office which mattered;

but he couldn't help wondering if even the office mattered very much.

He felt happier about his first communion. It was Christmas morning, and Mrs. Bligh went out alone with him into a shimmering darkness of new-fallen snow. The trees bent low with wreaths of fantastic loveliness; as far as the eye could see, a mantle of soft and endless purity was pressed down over the world. A late star lingered in the gray sky.

The church was full of light and holly; the music of the Christmas hymns rang out victorious and certain. It sounded as if there really had been some one who saved the world.

Jim remembered, with a shock of joy, that for all these months of preparation and prayer his physical thirsts had never troubled him. They had been transferred into some other portion of his being; they were still there, but it was for his soul he thirsted, and for all the souls of men.

As he knelt with his head buried in his hands, the visible world melted away from him—he was conscious of an immense gift about to descend upon him, an unseen presence, white as the outer world, shaking away all that was earthly and could be shaken, and leaving in him only invisible forces built for eternity.

There was a faint movement beside him; he knew that the great moment had come. Mrs. Bligh rose to her feet, and he followed her.

His shoes creaked; he knew who the people were who stood in the aisle. The waiting seemed interminable, and filled with uncomfortable clutching thoughts. He wished he needn't have got up from his knees and the dark.

Then he found he was kneeling beside her again; there was the altar in front of them, white and red with flowers.

He made an enormous effort to blot out the little intrusive, conscious world; the hurried, whispered bleat of the vicar's voice; the sense of the actual silver cup lifted and given into his hands.

He would not think of anything at all, but let the presence of God reach him as it would.

He was sorry for his sins and he wanted God: that would be enough.

He thought the presence had reached him; but he was never sure.

It was just as difficult getting back into his seat afterward; in fact, it was more difficult because he forgot about the foostool.

When they came out into the air again, the snow had already begun to melt, and most of it had run to puddles.

CHAPTER XVIII

WARREN MANOR was not a house in which accidents often happened.

When the village children had measles all the little Blighs escaped it; they did not fall out of trees; nor get into moral and physical difficulties over summer fruit. Their sins were slight and infrequent, and as far as possible confined to the involuntary lapses of human nature.

The servants, too, lived a surface life of perfect smoothness and propriety. Their manners were quiet and their aprons whiter than snow.

Mrs. Bligh gave them good wages and excellent food, and knew all about their families. She was faultlessly kind and considerate to them; and none of them had ever laughed, cried, or sneezed in her presence.

She didn't know anything about their lovers; no young men were allowed to visit them, and Mrs. Bligh never mentioned the subject—after this point had once been made plain—any more than she would have mentioned the tails of monkeys.

There was a certain amount of trouble in the household caused by Mr. Bligh's ardent temperament; but Mrs. Bligh managed to keep most of it to herself, and as Mr. Bligh had a tender heart, and always told her everything, she succeeded in steering him through the results of his blunders without disaster.

She had married him for love, and called him in her youth the Don Quixote of her dreams; but she was very careful to remove all the windmills in his vicinity.

After ten years of happy married life Mr. Bligh's ideals had become reduced to picturesque theories. Perhaps his temperament would have given his wife less trouble if she had allowed him a larger margin for his enthusiasms, but, on the whole, she was more afraid of his enthusiasms than

of his temperament. Enthusiasms often reduced incomes; whereas temperaments, when kept in play, will not reduce anything.

The boys were a responsibility, but they had never been a bother. They were well-mannered and well-bred; and no being on earth can conceal more than a well-mannered, well-bred English public school-boy.

Sometimes you find out what he doesn't know, but you can not find out what he does. Nor did Mrs. Bligh wish to find out. She agreed with her husband that the boys should be put on their honour and left alone. She gave them all the moral influence she could spare from her family; as she was not an emotional woman, this did them practically no harm. But no policy of men nor of angels can keep human nature permanently secure, and when an accident at length produced itself at Warren Manor, it crashed through the polished surface of the house like an explosive shell.

The cook was the first witness of the accident; her manner betrayed extreme uneasiness over the morning's orders, and she suggested making beef-olives out of the remains of the mutton. Finally, she confessed that she was 'that upset' she hardly knew where she was. Mrs. Bligh's eyes recalled her quickly to her exact position on the pale-blue carpet of the morning room.

'I think you had better tell me what is the matter?' Mrs. Bligh suggested coldly; for she did not like things that mattered, early in the morning.

The cook took a hurried breath, and said she supposed it would all have to come out sooner or later, but it gave her a turn to think of it.

She was a kind-hearted woman, and she urged her mistress to remember that, of course, sometimes these things were to be looked upon as accidents. Mrs. Bligh asked her what things? The cook said girls and boys were that awkward when you came to think of it—and her mother had once said that, after all, it was the marring of some and the making of others. Emily had always seemed all right, and the cook had never noticed anything to speak of—till this morning—when, as she was frying the bacon and Emily came in with the tray, it had struck her all of a heap.

Mrs. Bligh asked what had struck her; but it was a rhetorical question; she knew by now what had struck the cook.

The cook turned the colour of boiled beetroot, and said perhaps the mistress had better see Emily for herself.

'I asked her right out who it was,' the cook explained getting more and more flustered under Mrs. Bligh's cool and steady eyes. 'And she did say that young Barton—'is name come to the tip of 'er tongue, as it were—though she never had a civil word for, or about him, before. I will say that for her——'

'Thank you, cook,' said Mrs. Bligh incisively. 'You need not tell me anything more. Please send Emily to me.'

The cook hurried down the passage trembling and muttering. She told Emily, to comfort her, that if she were in her place, she would a sight rather meet an alligator than the mistress.

But this alternative did not present itself to Emily.

She went into the morning-room as a criminal goes to execution; and she received what she went for.

Emily was, for the first time in her life, disturbed and inattentive. Her face was distorted with tears, and her apron crumpled. She twisted her hands in and out of its folds as if it could relieve the situation, which she could not twist or wind herself out of.

Mrs. Bligh looked at her once and then looked away again. It was almost more terrible when she looked away. It was so final.

There are some people who rush to help sinners because they see they are in trouble; in their impulsive ardour they get into the trouble themselves, but sometimes they help the sinner out of it. Perhaps they are aware of a fellow-feeling. Mrs. Bligh was not one of this officious and clumsy fellowship. She never touched pitch; so that she ran no risk of getting defiled.

She sat there, a contented, married woman with three children, awful in her purity; no iceberg could have looked colder, or more remote from the experiences of the girl before her.

'This is all *very, very* distressing,' Mrs. Bligh began after a pause.

It was very distressing for Emily, but not quite so dis-

tressing for Mrs. Bligh. Besides, her uppermost feeling was disgust, not distress; and Emily could feel that Mrs. Bligh's real feeling was disgust.

She sobbed and threw her apron over her head.

'Such a thing has never happened in my house before,' Mrs. Bligh continued, with the unconscious egotism of personal immunity, 'and it is, of course, a very great disgrace and sin on your part, Emily. Indeed, I simply can not understand how it could have occurred.'

Emily choked with sobs. She might have told Mrs. Bligh that things occur very easily when they are not understood, and she could have added that even Mr. Bligh had kissed her once behind the scullery door.

But she didn't dare; and besides, in that case nothing further had happened. Mr. Bligh had only given her five shillings the next day and looked rather silly.

'I can not help blaming you,' said Mrs. Blight, 'most. Women of your age should have learned how to keep their self-respect and the respect of others.'

Emily sobbed harder; then she saw a loophole for justification and took it.

'It's very hard on me,' she wailed, 'having had any one like a young gentleman—that wasn't one—in the house, and going to early services and all.'

It was a shrewd thrust; Emily, looking round the corner of her apron, saw that it had taken effect. Mrs. Bligh winced as if she had trodden on a slug.

'If it is any comfort to you to know it,' she observed after a moment's pause, 'you will not be the only one to suffer. Of course you will leave the house immediately, but so will the—the partner of your sin.'

It was a great comfort to Emily. Victorious spite is extremely pleasant, and the memory of it lasts after other memories have faded. As a momentary sensation it practically equals that joy in heaven over the one sinner that repenteth.

Emily had her moment's victory; but it should be forgiven her, for she had a very bad time afterward.

'Of course,' Mrs. Bligh said, with frosty charity, 'I shall not turn you adrift. Will your parents consent to receive you?'

Emily couldn't, and perhaps wouldn't, go home to her parents. She thought hurriedly for a moment, while she sobbed convulsively, and then declared that they would turn her out of doors on the spot. She had always been one to hold her head so high, and she had younger sisters.

The thought of going home drove her to the door of hysteria, but not through it. Mrs. Bligh's manner restrained her. Nobody had ever had hysterics in her presence, and nobody ever would.

'I think,' Mrs. Bligh said decisively, 'that, in that case, you had better go to the Sisters of St. Mary's Penitentiary. I will arrange for cook to take you there this afternoon. You can remain there until the birth of your child, and for a month afterward. If you do well, they will try to find you a situation and take care of your child for you if——' Mrs. Bligh paused for a moment—'it should be so unfortunate as to live,' she finished tranquilly.

Mrs. Bligh thought of her own two babies who had died, and it did not make her tender toward the other woman's child.

'I think that is all,' she added, rising to close the interview. She looked at Emily again now, and said with formidable gentleness,—

'I shall pray for you, Emily.'

Emily waited for a moment; perhaps she was expecting something more. She knew that Mrs. Bligh was a very good woman, and she respected her, all the more for being despised by her, but she thought that perhaps when Mrs. Bligh had got over despising her she would help her.

However, it wasn't any use Emily's waiting. Mrs. Bligh thought that her prayers would be quite enough, and she never got over despising Emily.

CHAPTER XIX

EMILY met Wivvle as she crept sobbing across the hall. He would have passed her with his head held stiffly away, but she clutched his arm like a frightened animal. He stopped rigidly; every nerve in his being resented this contact with Emily. All that ought to have kept him from her in the first instance drove him from her now, when it was too late to save her, and only not too late to save himself.

'Let me go,' he said in a low, fierce whisper. 'Don't you realise this place is public?'

But Emily was beyond the consideration of outward things. She lifted her sodden, tear-stained face to his as if the pain in it would touch him when she could no longer attract him. This is perhaps the greatest mistake that any woman can make.

'I must speak to you,' she whispered. 'It's all out. I've been with her—oh, I didn't know it was going to be like this!'

Wivvle had not known it either. The panic of the unimaginative, overtaken by reality, seized them both; but Wivvle was the more afraid—he was only afraid for himself.

'It's all right about you,' she whispered eagerly; 'I've laid it on to that barge boy—Jim Barton—it won't matter about him.'

'Good God! Why did you do that?' Wivvle asked angrily. 'Things are bad enough already without your tangling me up in a tissue of lies!'

Emily gazed at him incredulously.

'But,' she said, 'I thought it was what you wanted. You said last night if it had only been him, with no family—— Of course I should never have looked at him! I fair hate the sound of his voice! But I said it to save you!'

'Oh, hell!' said Wivvle with uneasy exasperation—as if Emily could possibly save him—as if she could do anything

now, but bore him! 'Never mind—let go of my arm—here's old Bligh coming along.'

Emily dropped his arm and scuttled behind the green baize door which led to the servants' quarters. She felt a strange sense of relief when she was on the other side of the door. A week or two earlier she had felt as if she didn't belong there; she wanted to belong there now.

Mr. Bligh had not seen his wife, but he was aware that there was uneasiness in the household. It set his nerves on edge and he spoke a trifle sharply to Wivvle.

'You ought to be at your work,' he said. 'What do you want with Emily at this hour of the morning?'

Wivvle, who from the moment of Mr. Bligh's approach had become imperturbable and quiet as velvet, replied that he merely wanted to ask her about his washing.

Mr. Bligh's annoyance cleared instantly. He patted Wivvle on the shoulder, and murmuring, 'Perfect confidence of course—breeding—reliable——' turned off into his study.

Wivvle heard his words and flushed with genuine compunction. For a moment he nearly did what he expected of himself. He nearly followed Mr. Bligh into his study and told him the whole truth. He did not know that if he did not do it then he would never do it; or that his conscience would be unable twice to give him the same sharp lead. He was so little used to sharpness; he felt sure he would find an easier opportunity of speaking to Mr. Bligh a little later on.

When he had seen Pritchard and Ainley, for instance. It wouldn't be quite fair, after he had taken them both so completely into his confidence, to act without asking their advice.

He was so sure of his own sense of fair play that he could easily transfer it from what was essential to what was optional, and yet feel convinced that when the moment of pressure came the *beau geste* would be given him.

He did not realise that, when a man has acted ignobly, a *beau geste,* even if it occurs to him, does not remove the consequences of his act.

To his relief he found his confidants alone.

'Look here, you fellows,' he said impressively, 'a most appalling thing has happened. It's out about Emily, and she's told Mrs. Bligh it's Barton.'

Pritchard gave a long, low whistle. It was the whistle of a defeated intellect. But Ainley was made of sterner stuff. He fixed his monocle into his eye and laid his finger on the way of escape.

'But why not?' he asked composedly. 'Why shouldn't it be Jim Barton? It won't hurt him to speak of—he's nearly finished his time here—he has no people—and nobody knows him. Nothing could be more natural. Quite a stroke on Emily's part. And it lets you out, beautifully.'

'Only you overlook one thing,' said Wivvle, and try as he might he could not keep the note of interrogation out of his voice. 'Of course I can't do it—it would be a cad's game.'

'Not a bit of it,' broke in Pritchard hurriedly. 'I'm sure Ainley's right. It isn't as if it had been one of us. You've been most frightfully decent to the chap. If he has an atom of good feeling in him he'll be glad to help you. It isn't mean if you *ask* him—I grant you it would be if you did it without asking.'

'You can pay him for it, as far as that goes,' urged Ainley. 'He's as poor as a dog.'

'Oh, that——' said Wivvle handsomely.

He was beginning to feel handsome again; after all he might be able to get out of it without feeling a cad.

He wouldn't have accepted Ainley's advice alone—Ainley had rather too sharp a business code for Wivvle to follow—but Pritchard was all right. Pritchard did not believe in a man's acting to his own advantage except when the temptation was overwhelming.

There was only one joint in Pritchard's armour which Wivvle overlooked. He would be unable to feel anything right which did not save Wivvle at the expense of Barton.

'Of course I would see that he didn't suffer in any way,' Wivvle said, still looking defensively at his two advisers. 'I might start him in something later on. If I see he really doesn't mind, you know. Only it does seem rather a low-down thing to suggest.'

Ainley said,—

'What about Emily? As she's done it already you'd be rather putting her in a hole if you deny it, won't you? Quite a sport that girl, I must say.'

'That's true,' said Wivvle with relief.

Of course he wouldn't put Emily into a hole—at least, not into a little hole.

The man-of-the-world tone used by Ainley was a curious relief to Wivvle. The sick distaste he felt for Emily—and even a little for himself—left him. After all, such things happen every day. He had behaved generously to Emily, and she would be perfectly all right, of course. She was a handsome, superior girl—when she had not been crying—perhaps Jim would like to marry her. It was rather a big concession for Wivvle to make; but he felt that it was a moment for big concessions.

The whole question might resolve itself into a good thing for Jim. Wivvle decided he would get his father to make Jim an under-bailiff in Scotland. He could always go to Norway instead for salmon fishing. It had hurt him too abominably to see himself as a gainer by Jim's generosity, but after all he needn't look at it like that. Jim could be the gainer, and Wivvle could still be generous.

'Of course the whole thing depends on how he takes it,' he observed in a relieved voice. 'I daresay I could make it rather a chance for him in some way, if he's for it. But I shan't urge him in any way. I wonder if his religion won't rather stick in his throat?'

'Not a bit of it,' said Ainley; 'that's where you score. What about bearing one another's burdens! If he jibs at all, sling that at him.'

Wivvle winced. His idea was that Jim wasn't exactly to bear a burden; he was merely to receive a reward for removing an inconvenience. Emily by now was nothing but inconvenience. The burden once off Wivvle's shoulders had grown miraculously small.

'Well,' he said nonchalantly, 'I suppose I shall have to take the advice you fellows have given me. You've been awfully decent about it—and I'll go and have it out now with old Barton. But I must say women are no end of a nuisance.'

The other two looked at him admiringly, and his spirits rose under their homage. They obviously thought the better of him for his complications. Besides, they weren't simply sick of Emily.

Jim laid his book aside the moment Wivvle came into the room.

He had noticed the traces of tears on Emily's face the day before, and his eyes, more accustomed to the changes of life, had guessed the reason of her tears.

Wivvle had never spoken to him about Emily, but Jim saw now that he meant to speak about her.

Wivvle moved a little uncertainly about the room. He had it on his tongue's tip, as he came upstairs, to begin the conversation by saying,—

'I've had rather a good idea about you, Barton, if you feel like falling in with it.'

But as he met Jim's eyes, friendly but searching, with that curious directness of gaze which had first attracted him, he found himself hurriedly saying instead,—

'Look here, I've got into the deuce of a mess!'

Jim pointed to a chair opposite the table and drew out his pipe.

'Well,' he said, 'let's hear what it is. I've been in the deuce of a mess myself before now, and got out again.'

Wivvle sat down a trifle awkwardly for him and played with a cigarette without lighting it.

'Women are a dashed nuisance,' he began fretfully. 'I really ought to have kept clear of them till I'd passed for Sandhurst. But what's a man to do when they won't let you alone?'

The eyes opposite him hardened. Jim had not much sympathy for that plea which has been the inspiration of all uncomfortable men since the garden of Eden.

He made a quick descent from the agreeable abstract to the disagreeable concrete.

'Do you mean you've got Emily into trouble?' he asked.

The question offended Wivvle deeply. He hesitated, and found himself on the verge of a direct denial. It was only the remembrance that he had got to play straight now to save himself in the end which prevented him from a fresh evasion.

He put aside the tactlessness of Jim, and told his story as plainly as he could.

He went on with more confidence when he had once started because he saw that he wasn't shocking Jim.

Jim thought the whole matter quite an everyday affair evidently, and he was curiously free from reproach.

'I thought somebody had turned the girl's head the moment I saw her,' was his only comment; but if he was not prepared to condemn Wivvle he didn't seem prepared to admire him either.

Apparently Jim did not think the turning of Emily's head a very clever thing to have done. Wivvle had to point out that, though he felt a cad for doing it, after all he was barely nineteen and Emily twenty-four.

Jim agreed that she ought to have known better.

'Still, she'll have to pay for it,' he added reflectively, and he didn't seem inclined to add anything else.

Wivvle resented this aspect of the subject and explained defensively that he had been to a lawyer; and, while owing to the lawyer's advice he had denied his paternity, he had made a very handsome arrangement for Emily—twenty pounds down and five shillings a week until the child was sixteen. The lawyer said it was a most generous arrangement, and that she was a lucky girl. But Jim still did not seem to be dazzled by Emily's good fortune. He merely remarked,—

'It'll take all of that to get her under way again. But I daresay when it's all over she'll be able to earn enough to keep herself and the child going.'

'You see, I haven't a very large allowance,' Wivvle said a little reproachfully.

'She hasn't got anything at all, and she's lost her job,' Jim reminded him. 'But you'll have thought of that, of course.'

As a matter of fact, Wivvle hadn't thought of it.

The whole thing was quite unexpectedly awkward, and twenty pounds down and five shillings a week sounded princely for any one in Emily's position. He became suddenly dignified and vague.

'Ah, I shall look after her, of course,' he said, getting up and gazing out of the window.

He had every intention of never seeing Emily again. In fact it was part of the agreement that he had drawn up with the lawyer. The money was contingent on there being no

molestation on Emily's part. Emily had cried when she was told what 'no molestation' meant, but she had signed the agreement.

'It'll be funny,' said Jim unexpectedly, 'having a child. I should like it if it was me. I've always had a hankering for a kid of my own.'

Wivvle winced. He was shocked at Jim's point of view.

Sins are seldom shocking to the conventional mind, but a plain statement of their results can be extremely shocking.

Wivvle had felt that, once he had paid the twenty pounds, it would cease to be his child. Evidently Jim lacked all sense of good breeding, and it was peculiarly difficult to go on with so delicate a matter any further. For a moment Wivvle almost wondered whether it wouldn't be better—he meant easier—to drop the whole thing.

But after all he couldn't drop it. The only way to drop the subject was to go on until he had got rid of it.

There was a bewildering absence of any agreeable alternative to this particular situation.

Wivvle came back to the table and faced Jim's steady quiet eyes with their baffling candour.

'Look here, old chap,' he said desperately, 'you don't know what I'm up against! This business fairly knocks me out. The Blighs will turn me adrift to-morrow—oh, he wouldn't—but she will—she's as hard as iron and ice. Oh, the dearest little woman in the world as long as you mind your P's and Q's, I grant you; but, by Jove, she's flint as far as things of this kind are concerned. She's the kind of woman to marry really, once you've had your fling.

'But it'll do me out of my chance for the army, and that'd be bad enough. Being a soldier is the only thing I ever wanted. I can't see myself doing anything else.

'But that's not the worst. What I mind most is my people.

'This'll break my mother's heart. I've got to let her know because my father always tells her everything—and she believes in me—she hasn't any sense about it—she believes I'll come up to any scratch—and I hope I would, of course, about most of 'em—but she's particularly keen about women—I don't know why. But I know she thinks I'm as safe as houses.'

Jim wondered, if this were so, why it had failed to be

remembered at the only time when it could have been of any practical use. But he felt very sorry for Wivvle. He knew from his own experience that there are things which need all the grit a man has got to resist.

Now would be the moment his friendship had waited for and believed in—he would see the flash of the sword of Wivvle's honour. He still believed Wivvle had got honour.

'That's bad,' he said kindly. 'I don't know what it would be like, but I can guess. You see, my mother's dead.'

'Yes,' said Wivvle eagerly, 'that's just what I thought—if you were in my place, if you *could* be—you'd have nobody to mind. You leave here in a month or so, anyhow, don't you? And nobody really knows you. It wouldn't queer your pitch, I mean? You aren't going to live here, and anyhow it'll all be hushed up—trust the Blighs for that. Nobody'll know anything outside the house. Mrs. Bligh'll square the lot of them somehow.

'What I thought was, if you didn't mind just taking my place. You see, Emily lost her head this morning when she was accused of being in trouble. She named you to shield me. Of course, it was an awful thing for her to do. I told her at once I should deny it.'

Wivvle waited for a moment for the tribute of Jim's thanks, but he got no thanks. Jim took his pipe out of his mouth and said,—

'She must have thought a lot of you to do that.'

Wivvle dismissed Emily's affection with a wave of his hand. It seemed to him irrelevant now that he no longer wanted it.

'My idea was to go at once to old Bligh and deny it,' he said firmly; then his eyes wavered.

Jim's, fixed steadily on him, probed to the root instinct of his selfishness. Wivvle had not given his idea much of a chance.

'Of course, I will in any case,' Wivvle finished lamely, 'if you decide you'd rather not help me out?'

He didn't offer Jim the under-bailiffship. It was another of those moments when it seemed better to wait for an easier opportunity.

Jim did not speak for quite a long time. He was so angry that he looked down at the table-cloth to hide his emotion.

Wivvle did not dream of the fury that possessed Jim, because Wivvle did not realise what he was asking. The whole predicament had become for him a vague discomfort easily shifted. He did not see it as a monstrous debt which he was asking Jim to pay.

Jim thought about Eliza and what he would have felt if Eliza had been Emily and had to support a child without a name. He thought of himself, too, and what would be thought of him for getting a respectable girl into trouble and leaving her to it. He thought of his new-found religion, and the comments on it that would instantly follow his exposure.

Anger clutched him by the throat and shook him. From the bottom of his soul he felt wronged, and he felt that Emily was wronged. He did well to be angry. But still he did not speak. Something in Wivvle's sudden silence held him back. Wivvle had been so busy talking when he came in—so fluent and so glibly self-preservative—that Jim had been unconscious of the fear behind his words, and his essential ignorance.

Wivvle's thoughts about himself had hidden his actions from Jim. He simply wasn't a hero after all. He looked like a hero—even now—with his clear eyes and troubled brows; his curls thrown back and his fine head erect. He looked every inch a hero. Unfortunately inches don't make heroes; perhaps it is not very just to expect them to.

Jim began to ask himself if it was fair to ask too much from Wivvle? The sense of Wivvle's weakness did not feed Jim's anger. It softened it.

Wivvle was not one of those honest sinners who get into the rough and tumble of their sins and fight for what they want; he let his inclination force him into a situation which his spirit could neither accept nor escape.

Jim looked up at him at last with tolerant, kind eyes. He had lost a great illusion, but his heart ached for his friend.

Wivvle was sitting crouched forward against the table—he was sick with a sudden fear that he wasn't after all going to escape, and that this slight inconvenience for Jim was once more to be turned into an incredible menace for himself.

'I don't think I can lie about it for you,' said Jim quietly, 'but I can stand to it. If I'm not asked I won't deny it;

I mean, if they believe it I'll let them believe it. I won't give you away, and I'll take the punishment all right if they dismiss me.'

Wivvle gasped his relief; then he pulled himself together, and said with an effort to revive his collapsed dignity,—

'Of course I shouldn't expect you to lie for me.'

It *was* what he had expected, but what Jim suggested would do nearly as well; no one would believe in Jim.

'Mrs. Bligh knows it already,' he explained. 'She won't ask you any questions. She simply won't speak to you again; and as for old Bligh, you can easily bluff old Bligh. If you'll really hold your tongue, it's a damned decent thing for you to do for me, Barton. I'll never forget it. Perhaps some day it'll be my turn to do something for you, and I rely on you to let me know if I ever can.'

Wivvle thought there was something curious about Jim's face. He looked suddenly as if he had been kicked blind, but he made no protest; he only forgot to carry the thing off properly. It would have helped Wivvle to get out of the room comfortably if Jim had agreed to his offer—or made light of his own share in the transaction; but he let Wivvle go out of the room without making light of anything.

After Wivvle had gone he put his hand up to his eyes, as if the sunshine dazzled him.

He could not quite believe it.

His eyes wandered till they rested on a little silver crucifix Mrs. Bligh had given him on Christmas day. She had said that she hoped it was not superstitious to believe that it could keep a man from harm. Jim stumbled forward and knelt before it; but he could not pray. Wivvle had said that she believed he had done this thing—believed it without the need for any further witness—and she would never speak to him again.

It was all a mistake—she could not believe it—he would see her and look in her clear, gray eyes; and she, who knew what he had fought for, prayed for, and gained out of all she had given him, would restore something in him that seemed to be going to break. He tried to think what there would be left of God if, after all, she didn't believe in him.

CHAPTER XX

JIM found Mrs. Bligh in her boudoir. She had just come in from the garden with a great bunch of Christmas roses in her arms.

A faint flush of colour shone in her cheeks from the whipping wind. She was dressed in white serge, and she had an ermine collar across her shoulders, and a tiny little ermine cap set deep on her fair hair.

Jim watched her hands move deftly over the Christmas roses on their tray. It seemed to him as if her delicate white fingers were made of the same frail, impalpable substance.

The two little girls hovered round her like butterflies, carrying two small blue vases which, they urged, they must fill for the nursery.

Mrs. Bligh stood there with her hands on the flowers and her head flung back; her eyes were full of tenderness and laughter. She was teasing them with the consenting, playful, teasing of happy love; then she looked up suddenly and saw Jim.

She stiffened instantly and stood quite still; Jim saw the laughter and the tenderness pass out of her face until she looked as if she were made of frost. Her eyes met his with a deadly calmness of recognition; then returned watchfully, to her children. She made a cruel little gesture as if she stood between them and danger.

They stopped their dancing and became as still as she; they, too, felt the sudden icy wind which had frozen the kindness out of her.

'Go into the nursery,' she said, in a toneless, gentle voice. 'I will bring you some of the flowers soon.'

They obeyed without a protest. As they passed Jim they turned away their smooth fair heads punishingly, to accentuate his disgrace.

Mrs. Bligh began to arrange the flowers methodically in

a wide, crystal bowl. Sometimes they fell forward loosely over her fingers, and she replaced them with a firm, quick touch without impatience.

'I do not know why you have come here,' she said. 'It would have been better for you not to come. I have nothing at all to say to you.'

Jim fixed his eyes on her with a dumb insistence of longing. Surely she would lift hers to his with her tender intuition and restore his heart? She could not shut him out of the world of laughing tenderness she had for her children and all weak things. Even if he had sinned as Wivvle had sinned, would there not be for him still her pity and the mercy of her unstinted maternity; or was her motherhood only for her own—the narrow, sterile passion of an unpassionate heart?

It seemed as if it was. She would not look at Jim, nor draw from his dumb, expressive face any of the answers his heart held for her. She would never willingly hear anything that he had to say to her again.

Jim had given up the question of his guilt the moment he first met her eyes. He saw that she had judged him without hesitation or reprieve; but it was harder to give up his confidence in her mercy. Because to give up that was to believe her to be less than he had thought her, and it was far easier for Jim to accept condemnation than to give it. The incredulity in his eyes settled into protest.

'Look here,' he said roughly, 'what kind of a game is it to play to call yourself a Christian and have no forgiveness?'

Her hands moved on unfalteringly among the loose, frail buds.

'I forgive you as a sinner,' she said coldly, 'but I do not forgive your sin; nor do I wish to speak to you again. You have made it impossible. There are sins which cause gulfs between human beings; gulfs which are impassible—and yours is one of them.'

'You oughtn't to say that,' Jim urged desperately. 'If forgiveness means anything, it means wiping out any sin. I thought mothers were as merciful as God.'

'I do not know what you have done to expect mercy,' Mrs. Bligh observed, with an added edge to her voice.

She thought that the reference to her maternity was impertinent.

'There is a plain way of repentance marked out for you —but you have not attempted to take it—and no religion bestows forgiveness without the fruits of repentance.'

'Do you mean Emily ought to be married?' Jim asked. 'But she doesn't want to marry me, nor I her. Wouldn't it be as bad to marry—feeling like that—as anything that has happened?'

'I don't wish to discuss this subject with you,' said Mrs. Bligh, lifting her cool, untroubled eyes to his face. 'I believe my husband is waiting to see you in his study.'

'But you're my friend,' Jim pleaded. 'Surely you aren't going to let me go out anyhow, believing this of me?'

'I am not your friend,' she answered steadily. 'I was most willing to be of use to you as a human being, and as my husband's charge. I saw that you needed help and assistance, and I tried to show you where you might find them. I had no personal feeling in the matter, and I have none now.'

Jim stared at her. Was she speaking the truth? Hadn't she cared for all his homage and his eagerness—hadn't she let him be her child's companion, and her own?

Were all the summer hours they had spent together building up his new world of words and ideas, and all the silent hours of their prayers, nothing to her at all?

She had seen his worship in his eyes, and she had accepted it. She had not recognised any class distinction as a separation between them while he pleased her, but she was making him feel it now that he displeased her. She was making him feel everything that it was in her power to make him feel, because what he had wounded in her was her sense of power. She had believed she could do what she liked with Jim, and her supremacy had been threatened by a housemaid.

He had offended Mrs. Bligh's pride and her taste at one blow. She might have forgiven him these two things if she had felt that he was wholly subservient to her. The depth of her interest in him before marked the depth of her distate for him now; all his defects became insults. Jim did not know what had happened, but he had a sense that she was not speaking the truth. Her feelings were a closed door to

him, and he struck against it with his bared heart, insistently and in vain.

'Can't you understand,' he pleaded, 'that a man may fail, and yet need help? That it's not till he really stumbles that he does need it? You're a married woman—you ought to know what men and women are like?

'And if you can't forgive me, you might have forgiven Emily. Oh, not what you call forgive—but you might have let her feel you cared, and were the same as she is. She's harder hit than a man, and she's got the world against her—but you needn't have been against her. You might have made her feel there was something stronger than the world!'

Mrs. Bligh set her lips into a thin, hard line. She had no need of any further witness; this boy before her had spoken blasphemy. He had said she was the same as Emily.

'I have just told you that I will not discuss this matter with you,' she said. 'You have presumed too far, first on my kindness, and now on my patience. As to what you say about the poor girl you have wronged, it is absurd, and you are the last person to say it. Whatever she has to suffer, you—and you alone—have inflicted it. I must ask you for the second time to leave me.'

'Oh, I'll go now,' said Jim recklessly. 'Nothing can matter any more now. I believed in what you taught me because I thought it made people better; I see now that it makes them worse.

'It keeps them out of facing things. Why, my old skipper, without a clean word in his head, would have seen straighter into this thing than you!'

His words came back into his own heart, but they held no meaning for Mrs. Bligh.

As he had not gone at her bidding, she withdrew her attention from him as completely as if he were no longer there.

She was as remote and as fixed as the imperishable snows; and at last Jim dragged his reluctant heart away from her as if it were a beleagured traveller, dying of the cold.

Mrs. Bligh did not raise her eyes when he had gone, but she felt a vague sense of relief. Something had troubled her. She had been judged, and she was not used to being judged.

She told herself that this experiment, like all her husband's

experiments, had failed; and she gave a little, brave, self-pitying sigh, as she thought how often she had had to bear the disagreeable results of her husband's failures.

CHAPTER XXI

IT was almost a relief to Jim to find himself facing his second ordeal.

The fire was burning brightly in Mr. Bligh's study; there was a sense of comfort and immunity in the thick-carpeted book-lined room; the very smell of tobacco and leather had something vaguely coarse and kind about it.

Mr. Bligh's hair was more on end than ever; his collar was pulled crooked, and he was attempting to smoke his pipe upside down, appalled by the clash of his sympathies and his obligations. Mrs. Bligh had explained to him carefully that they were quite different things, but Mr. Bligh always found it difficult to keep his obligations and his sympathies separate.

He was sorriest for Emily; all his chivalry was roused for her; in a sense she was more in his charge than Jim—he had not thought of this behind the scullery door, but he had thought of it when he helped Emily into the high dog-cart which was to take her to the penitentiary, and implored the cook—quite unnecessarily—to be kind to her.

Emily was young and very pretty, and in a trouble which Mr. Bligh was shocked to think she had received in his house; and here was Jim, not only one of his boys, but a real, genuine son of the soil, the happy result of a social experiment upon which Mr. Bligh had set his heart—acting with dreadful precocity and callousness; and yet somehow Mr. Bligh was sorry for Jim as well. He was sorry for Jim as if something had fallen on him out of the sky—something that had nothing to do with Emily. Mr. Bligh knew that things did fall out of the sky—unconnected, disastrous things, which seemed to wind up with Emilies, and which one did not seem able always to foresee or to prevent.

'You know this is quite dreadful,' he said with a nervous anxiety to take his bull by the horns; 'any way you look at it. From a perfectly fair-minded, modern point of view its

inadmissible—the laws of the state, you know—I quite grant that they are incomplete and they haven't gone into the subject yet thoroughly enough, but there *is* marriage, you know—in a sense provided, and everything arranged for it, a trifling fee—though I think it ought to be waived myself—and no one can get any harm by it . . . especially not if it's made more elastic afterwards.

'And a girl—unprotected—somehow or other, girls always *are* unprotected—in a friend's house! I don't say the position is menial—I hope no servant of mine has ever felt menial for a moment. I lend them all Sir Walter Scott's novels, and a gramophone when we go out on Sunday afternoons. But still it's a position which, when you come to think of it, really oughtn't to be taken advantage of—you know what I mean, don't you?'

Jim sat down in the leather armchair opposite Mr. Bligh and looked at him with indulgent eyes.

He did not blame Mr. Bligh for not believing him innocent. He saw that Mr. Bligh was feeling most upset and didn't know how to express himself, and Jim thought that perhaps it was a better thing to feel upset and not know how to express yourself, than to express yourself with perfect clearness and not to know how to feel upset.

'Well,' he agreed, 'things seem to have come to pieces somehow, sir'—a flicker of ironic laughter shone in his eyes—'but I couldn't quite say how.'

'No! No! Of course not! I don't ask it!' Mr. Bligh intervened hurriedly. 'One can't, you know, always say how. And a fine-looking strap—— I mean, if one looked at it from the poor girl's point of view now.

'I was most distressed when I saw her drive off to that Sisterhood this morning. Of course, she couldn't be in better hands, I admit that; but somehow it all seemed rather cheerless, you know—laundry work, they say—soap suds and perpetual chapel—and I couldn't help wondering if marriage now wouldn't have been better all round? Though I know you're very young.'

Jim shook his head and repeated his formula with some amusement.

'She doesn't want it,' he said firmly, 'and I don't want it.'

'Well, now, really,' said Mr. Bligh with a puzzled air. 'That seems very curious, doesn't it—and rather awkward when you come to think of it? Of course I know that, financially, you're not justified. Still, if a loan of twenty pounds——'

Mr. Bligh gave a cowed and guilty glance at the door. Married men with families should not offer twenty pounds to misbehaving pupils. He knew this, but the twenty pounds had sprung from his lips as lightly and irresistibly as Venus from the seas. Jim, watching him with critical eyes, felt a perverse desire to accept the money; to see if Mr. Bligh's generosity would have grit enough in it to pass into action. He had a vindictive moment when it seemed to him that he should like to pay them both out to the extent of twenty pounds. Then Mr. Bligh's nervous eyes recalled Jim to his deeper feeling of indulgence.

It is a cruel thing to tie a weak man down to his generosities.

'It isn't money,' Jim explained, 'thank you, sir, all the same. I'm afraid the whole thing's not what you call downright serious.'

Mr. Bligh shook his head regretfully, and tried unsuccessfully to look extremely stern.

'But the consequences,' he said, 'the consequences are very serious, you know, Jim, for her—and in a sense for you.'

'She's been squared as far as I can square her,' said Jim. 'What about me?'

'Your career, you know,' said Mr. Bligh limply. 'You've done so extraordinarly well. I wrote to Arthur the other day—I said you had proved my theory—grit and brain. You had achieved a miracle. And on the top of it I have planted the culture—quite enough, you know, for Cambridge—our time *was* drawing to an end.'

Mr. Bligh coughed and plunged his head despairingly into his hands.

'But it must come, you see,' he pleaded, 'to an end quicker! Example, you know—and poor Emily—one has to think of the others. They've all been sportsmen about it. They had to be told something. I spoke to them, man to man, you know. Wivvle was upset—he took it to heart—a high-minded, sen-

sitive lad—but they were all nice about you, Jim—that part of the plan *has* succeeded.

'But you see you couldn't stay on here, could you? Even if I admitted the most advanced views on the sex subject—and I don't know that I'm quite prepared to admit them. I'm enlightened, but I'm not extreme; not on sex questions, you know. There is so much to be said on both sides, and it doesn't do much good saying it, *does* it? But I think one must draw a line somewhere in the house, I do really.

'And there's my wife's religion, you know. I told you I always considered that?

'By-the-by, Jim, what's happened to your religion? I've always doubted the power of medieval superstitions to stand against nature—women, of course, are different. They're more medieval, when you come to think of it, and perhaps less natural. But you don't seem to have found it much of a help?'

'I don't know quite what I've found it yet,' said Jim dryly. 'I've got to find out, I suppose; but religion doesn't come to an end with the first lost sheep, does it?'

'No, no; of course, not in a sense,' Mr. Bligh agreed. 'Still, there are the ninety and nine just persons, you know, and they rather weigh down the scale inside the church. The vicar, for instance; he takes a very gloomy view of anything at all marked. I think probably you'd *better* leave us to-morrow.'

Mr. Bligh's eyes fixed themselves desperately upon Jim's. His whole heart was against this dismissal, but there were stronger forces at play than Mr. Bligh's heart.

'I'll go to-day,' said Jim kindly. 'I'll walk over to Mr. Atkinson's this afternoon.'

'Walk—my dear boy——' exclaimed Mr. Bligh; 'it's twenty miles, and I believe it's going to snow.'

'Yes,' said Jim; 'but I think I'd like to walk twenty miles.'

'But doesn't that seem a little extreme?' Mr. Bligh urged. 'You've not had lunch yet.'

'I don't want lunch,' said Jim, 'and if I'm to get in before night I'd better be going.'

He paused for a moment, then he lifted his eyes to Mr. Bligh's and said a little grimly,—

'I've seen Mrs. Bligh.'

Mr. Bligh blinked rapidly.

'Yes, yes,' he said sympathetically; 'of course—I suppose you had to. A perfectly good woman, you know—immaculate, I always call her. Nothing ever happens to good women quite, does it? I mean they can't be expected to feel for a man when he's down, can they? It's quite natural. You see, they think he oughtn't to be down.

'I'm all for the feminist movement, you know—economic independence and a kind of *rapprochement* between the sexes. But not with the older type of woman; it can't be done. They stand on a pedestal, you know, and would rather stay there. It's the beauty of holiness, and after all you can't have it both ways, can you? If you like the beauty of holiness it's safer up there, out of the way, where it can't get trodden on, isn't it?'

'I'd like to see holiness without a pedestal,' said Jim obstinately. 'It ought to be able to look after itself and us too.'

'Well, but in a sense it does,' Mr. Bligh protested, a little wistfully. 'If you live up to it, you know—it is most inspiring. I assure you it can be done.'

Mr. Bligh glanced down for a moment and sighed. He looked a little strained and sad for one who is living successfully upon inspiration.

'I admit it takes some doing,' he added after a pause. 'But life would be nothing without its ideals, would it? Now, my dear fellow—I needn't say that, however we look at this very trying incident of your life—we won't use harsher words—I hope you'll still consider me your friend?'

'Yes,' said Jim, 'I will.'

He shook hands with Mr. Bligh and went upstairs to pack. He made no other farewells. Something happened when he reached the hall which put them out of his head.

Denis rushed in; he was full of the joy of making a snow man. His cheeks and eyes were on fire; his whole buoyant figure tense with excitement; but, as his eyes rested on Jim, a curious change took place in him. All his joy faded. He did not spring forward as usual to claim Jim's absorption into his adventure. His small, erect figure held itself back; his eyes miserably wavered; an anguish of reproach and pain swept across his face.

Without a word he turned and stumbled away from the sight of his friend. All his ardour was struck down into the chill of memory. His mother had told him that this beloved friend had done a cruel and an evil thing. She had made the thought of Jim hideous in her child's eyes, and, as he turned obediently from the presence of the evil-doer, he heard her warning to him audibly justified, for Jim stood still in the hall and cursed bitterly.

CHAPTER XXII

IT did not feel cold to Jim.

He was conscious that there was a violent and spiteful wind blowing, cutting off the tops of the trees and ravaging the life of the hedges; but he was glad of something to struggle against. What would have been hard to bear was a day in which beauty taunted his heart.

He could share the life of the stripped and fading leaves flying before the wind like tormented people in a panic, but he could not have borne their gay security.

The whipped, low fields were as empty as his desolate heart.

There was no visible sky; only a dull, gray void filled with the unfriendly clamour of the air. Nothing had any purpose ; the wind beat down on the earth with the unreasoning hysterical repetition of a scold.

This was where Jim belonged, out of doors, in a cold world, struggling; it had all been a mistake to put him into a beautiful, soft house, with dressed-up people who didn't understand facts.

Education? What had he got out of it? He had learned how to have his feelings hurt without being cold or hungry or knocked about. These things were bad, but he was used to them. Having his feelings hurt was worse. It would have been much better not to have learned feelings.

He turned his head away from the field path which led to the square-towered church—the memory of his hours there was like the sting of a whip-lash across his cheek.

What was the use of going to a church that pushed you out into the cold when you most needed help? It was bad enough not having given him the benefit of a doubt, but even if they had had no faith in him, couldn't they have held on to him?

Jim's mind rushed ceaselessly round its core of grief, returning with the persistence of a robbed bird to its empty nest.

Their main idea was to get rid of him—to get rid of Emily—to get rid of trouble. They had begged the question of life. Pain beat upon Jim's heart with the hammer-like ferocity of a toothache. The weight of it was on him, and the loneliness.

It is a mistake to believe that sensitiveness to pain is a sign of weakness. Weak natures respond more readily to pain, but never so deeply; it is only the strong who feel the full weight of a storm.

Jim had not forgotten Arthur, but all his incentives had for the moment weakened. He could not think easily of anything but Mrs. Bligh.

It is a cold business to part with an illusion, especially if you are not supple to illusion, and it has grown into your very soul with roots deeper than fact.

Jim set his mind doggedly upon the elusive figure of Mrs. Bligh. The veil of the temple was rent in twain; and what was destroyed in her took part of himself with it.

His first youth went with her supremacy; and all his dreams.

He saw that the virtues which he so loved in her—her common sense, her dignity and self-control—were, after all, only miniature virtues. She had evaded the two overwhelming qualities which sometimes seem more like sins than graces—love and compassion.

It was hard for Mrs. Bligh not to see that she was right, and the church had made it harder. By keeping all its rules she believed that she was obeying the law of God. She judged herself, and without leniency, by the church's standard.

She also judged others; she had just enough mercy to forgive the kind of faults she could have committed herself, but unfortunately they were not very many.

All the big questions of the sin-racked world had escaped her. She had had ceremonies instead of humanity.

Priesthood and sacraments, what were they in this broken world so full of tyrannies and sins? They did not take the place of oil and wine, or pay for ruined travellers at an inn.

Hadn't the church taken the presence of God out of the human heart and poked it into a mouse-trap?

What was left for a boy of nineteen whose mind could grasp these problems, and who had learned better than to get drunk?

It occurred to Jim that he would rather not go back to Arthur—even Arthur was educated and a gentleman. The river was still there, and the skipper would be sure to welcome him. Jim had five shillings in his pocket; and he didn't want any more education; it was too expensive.

Drink, breed, and rot! Life was much simpler if you looked at it like that and didn't have any fine feelings. You got something out of it then. You got what there was. But you didn't get all there was.

It was much simpler; but was it any more honest than Mrs. Bligh sending Emily to a Sisterhood?

Mrs. Bligh hadn't been able to shuffle out of the baby, and Jim couldn't shuffle out of his own soul. He knew there was something in him, now, that being on a barge wouldn't satisfy.

He would have to go on and make the best of it; even if making the best of it pulled him every which way. He set his teeth and pushed steadily on into the storm.

Jim was beginning to be tired now; the wind dropped and snow fell, at first desultory in occasional soft flakes, and then closing in with cold persistent fingers, blotting out the world.

Now and then Jim caught a glimpse of a group of farm buildings; once he passed through a village in which nothing moved.

The gray winter dusk was like the withdrawing of human consciousness when the blood runs thin, with faint, uneven pulses, and the sight of the eyes grow blurred and dim. Only the white, hard road was plain, winding interminably toward London.

He plunged suddenly over the brow of a hill into a beech forest; the giant trees stood like the pillars of a cathedral, with their interlaced branches forming a roof over his head.

There was no sound anywhere.

He stood quite still under the silent trees, as if there was no point in going on any more.

Life was not satisfactory; it did not substantiate its promises. It muddled things—a reformatory with the world a garden

beyond iron doors—and when you got into the garden, you found that the iron was still there.

Jim could not see any point in the judgments of God. He could not see, in anything that happened to him, anything very much like God.

He could have loved Christ; but Christ was crucified so very long ago.

It would be much better to stop thinking and curl up under the trees. Even if there was a God, He couldn't expect a boy to go on swimming for ever in a fog. Jim's body was ceasing to obey him. He seemed to be carrying all the weight of it in his thoughts. It was like being drowned again; only the safety seemed farther off.

But there was still something warm and savage in his heart that refused this last surrender. He possessed a quality tougher than life if he could only get hold of it.

He said Arthur's name over and over to himself to goad his body forward. When he tried to walk he reeled, but the unsteadiness of his limbs did not last long.

He became curiously conscious that he was no longer alone. Once or twice he looked behind him to see if some one was not by his side. There was no sound of footsteps, but there was a sense of companionship.

He moved safely out of the trees before the darkness caught him. The feeling of cold and loneliness decreased in the open road; it was as if Arthur's spirit had not waited for Jim's return to join him.

There are some human intimacies in which the soul knows that it need take no thought for the morrow, and can be at rest without explanations.

Such friendships are rare; they can exist without sentiment and with none of the rufflings of passion. They thrive on criticism, and disaster does not confuse them.

The breath of their life is equal liberty.

Jim did not give a thought as to how he should tell Arthur what had happened, but the knowledge that he should see him at his journey's end was like warming his frozen hands at a fire. All through the last heavy, plodding miles, wet through, with only the mechanical unfreshened strength of his second wind, his spirit felt accompanied.

At last he reached the little smoky town above the river, where Arthur lived. Lights came again, broken and flickering, and voices.

As Jim caught at the door of Arthur's home all his strength went out of him suddenly like water. He had a strange, bewildered feeling that eternity slipped between his knock at the door and any answer.

Then Arthur's housekeeper stood there looking at Jim curiously, her face distorted with tears and excitement. For a moment she looked at him without recognition; then she cried out suddenly,—

'Why, it's young Mr. James! Haven't you heard?'

Jim's eyes fixed themselves on her beseechingly; he knew that when people say, 'Haven't you heard?' they always mean something terrible.

'Come in! Come in!' she said distractedly. ''Is last words were,—

'"Bring him in at once, Alice, and keep something hot on the fire till he comes."

'The doctor said as 'ow it was 'eart failure, along of 'is walkin' miles in a wind on an empty stummick to christen a baby over at Crayford way that was took with fits.

''E just come in and opened the telegram to say as 'ow you was a-walkin' over from the gentleman you was staying with—and I was a-standing at the door, as I am now, only it was 'is study door, and I'd boiled an egg for 'is tea, and 'e says, "Bring 'im in at once, Alice, and keep something hot till he comes," and then 'e looks up past my 'ead, as if 'e 'eard some one a-calling of 'im, and just fell over as you might knock a vawse off the table with the back of your 'and!

'But for the Lord's sake come in and sit down, Mr. James, or we shall 'ave another corpse in the 'ouse before the morning.'

Jim groped his way in mechanically. His eyes were dazzled with light, and his mind refused to take the first sense of what had happened.

He could not have lost everything he had. Death was preposterous and incredible. It was like putting your foot down where there was nothing.

'I've got to tell him what's happened,' he muttered, drawing down his sullen eyebrows.

'Poor boy! 'Is 'ead's completely turned,' said Alice, hurrying away to get some food. 'An' no wonder—walkin' twenty miles through a snow-storm, and this at the end of it! Providence do seem fond of a queer turn sometimes, and no mistake!'

'I've got to tell him what happened,' Jim repeated firmly to himself, and then darkness crept over him, a darkness more complete than any physical loss—the darkness of a world in which there is no one to whom you can tell what has happened.

CHAPTER XXIII

A HUMAN spirit cast ashore after a storm of grief takes a long time to recover full consciousness. It lies in a 'no-man's-land' out of reach of the waves, but incapable of movement.

For six months after Arthur's death Jim's world was submerged in disaster. Flickering thoughts came to him of going to the bad. Evil had no particular attraction for him, but there seemed nowhere else to go. The results of wrong-doing seemed as formidable as the results of doing right, and they required less effort.

It was not grief alone that had unseated his will, but the crueller sense of having lost an object of worship. Jim had made an idol of Mrs. Bligh and worshipped her. God is a jealous God, who, for the sake of the worshipper, destroys idols; and when an idol falls, all that it stands for falls with it. The sense of the invisible had receded from Jim; he craved for the hardness of the material world.

He hated beauty now; he wanted brutal things that he could fight. He did not want to be guided by Arthur's memory; if Arthur had left him a single condition with his inheritance, Jim would have refused it.

But Arthur had left no conditions; he had simply left all he had in Jim's strong, young hands, as if it was certain Jim would know what to do with it. His trust was like a hand laid on Jim's shoulder. Jim couldn't shake it off, because he loved it.

After a few disconsolate, desultory weeks, he went to Cambridge, because Arthur had always said he wanted Jim to go to Cambridge.

There was none of the sharpness of life to be found within its old gray walls, but it was restful there.

The unharrassing, ancient customs, the kind, wise, old

scholars, with their accessible knowledge, soothed and stimulated Jim.

They were as impersonal as stones, but intellectually they kindled fires.

Scholars are an unobtrusive, kindly race. They will not come out of their shells unless attacked by intelligence; but they never fail to respond to intelligence when it attacks them.

Jim's questions roused his professor's interest, and he gave him the best he had—an effortless patience with detail, an inescapable obedience to fact and rather more reliance on reason than Jim had yet discovered in human beings. The professor cared about truth, and this lonely, surly, brooding boy cared also for truth. Jim did not want friendship. He was afraid of being helped or hurt, or moved any more. There was a weight upon his heart as heavy as time. He shrank from the laughter and youthfulness of his fellows, and refused to respond to the tentative advances which were made to him.

He settled down to work in a room which looked out upon a narrow street, enclosed by two high old walls. At the end of the street was the river. Jim could not see it from his windows, but he knew that, in a moment, he could be standing on a gray bridge and looking into vistas of hanging trees and over flat green fields, with here and there a solid stone building which had placidly held the youth and history of England for centuries.

It was easier for Jim to feel part of the place than part of the life within it. He felt akin to all the ancient landmarks. He was content, as they were, to brood unobtrusively over the stream of laughing youth which passed between those walls without check or trace. They were not personally involved in short adventures; they, like Jim, were out upon a quest for finality.

Jim took a purely practical view of education; he wanted to find out if one or two things were true, and then change his life to meet them. Christianity, for instance—did it shrink away from fact with the light scorn of a good woman from a sin she did not understand? Or was it a consoling dream fit for delicate and irresponsible beings who couldn't stand life without the padding of dreams? He asked several of the

Cambridge scholars for evidences of Christianity, and they gave him all they had, both for and against. Even the theological professor, who was one of the greatest scholars of his age, and wanted Christianity to be true, handled its difficulties with an unfettered reverence for fact. He never asked Jim to accept anything on authority. But it was different when Jim wanted to apply religion to modern life. All the delicate, deliberate researches of Cambridge seemed to fail at this further demand upon them. Nobody wanted to deal with a fact once they had proved it. The sense of the long, slow, chain of history blinded their eyes to the urgency of life. They could lay their fingers admirably upon the causes of modern evils, but they took them away again afterwards.

Jim could not take his fingers away. He had the instinct of the reformer. He wanted to cry aloud like Peter, 'Lord, not my feet only, but my hands and my head.'

He could not wait to find out any more before he acted upon it. The professor advised him, a little vaguely, to find out what social work the church was doing in Cambridge, but the church did not help Jim very much; its social efforts were dignified and ineffectual. Trying to find life in it was like putting your ear to a shell and listening to the far-off murmur of the sea. It is not the real voice of the sea which carried the delusive sound, but only the reverberation from within the drum of the ear.

There were good men to be found in the church, and very good women, but there was no ardour to turn the world upside down, and without ardour nothing turns upside down, not even a thimble.

Jim felt he couldn't bear to go on behaving as if the origins of Christianity and the upkeep of church services ought to take up all your time, when the world was breaking itself to pieces for lack of the practice of Christian principles. He found himself more in tune with a set of young and violent sceptics, who cared passionately to change life, but didn't believe in Christianity.

They wanted to free the world, and would have died to do it. They did run certain risks and gave up the minor conveniences of life.

Jim was secretly amused at the value they attached to

giving up comforts he had never had, but he admired their spirit. It was their choice of weapons for carrying on their warfare which struck him as unsatisfactory.

He thought their creed brittle and unthrifty. Jim knew life at first hand, and he had been brought up surrounded by evil.

He did not believe that even justice could cure vice. Nothing ever really sets human nature free but self-control. Easier conditions were the simpler half of the problem, but even if that were solved, what you were to do with the human heart still remained.

The men who thought they could legislate evil off the map didn't really know what evil was; they only knew the defects of incomplete goodness. In the hour of disaster their childish improvements would slip into nothingness, like sand swallowed up by the sea. They wouldn't look at Christianity because they thought it was old, and all the good sucked out of it by tyrants; but Jim wanted them to look at it, because he believed that nobody had sucked the good out of it, and that these particular violent young men, full of free love and blasphemy, were the stuff out of which Christians can be made. Jim had been dumb for two years, but one evening he found himself addressing the debating society in a queer flurry of opportunity and inspiration. Nobody knew who he was before this occasion, but after his first speech he became a name in Cambridge. Jim had a knowledge which was a new angle of vision to those who had always seen life through books, and a burning conviction which amazed spirits whose enthusiasms were light as thistledown.

At first Jim was conscious of perpetual pitfalls, clumsiness, and inexperience, and an odd innocence of other people's views forced him into dire mistakes, but he developed a curious grip upon his audience which kept them spellbound till he stopped speaking. He was never fettered to his own ideas—he wanted to convince himself, and no one who heard him ever went away with any sense of unfairness or glibness. When Jim came up to a difficulty, he tackled it like a football, as an object to batter through a goal after a hard struggle, taking his field with him. He never gave any sense of a man who knew things on authority, or who stood above the

crowd. Jim's professor took a mild interest in his efforts, though he warned him that few scholars ever shone in debate.

'They tell me you are on the side of violence,' he observed one day. 'That is a pity. Temper is always a confession of fear. Uncertainty of faith is the explanation of all the persecutions.

'It would be as well for you to remember that your opponent is never dangerous, only facts are dangerous. If your facts are safe it is an act of cowardice to lose your temper, and if your facts are not safe the sooner you find out and change them the better'.

'But if my opponent twists my facts?' Jim objected.

'Learn to put your facts,' said the Professor, with a gleam in his mild eyes, 'so that they can't be twisted. You must try to be as agile as if you were unfair, but you must never be unfair.'

Into this safe world of intellectual research and experiment life broke like a careless blunder and reset Jim's mind.

It was on one of the last days of term when Jim's landlady told him that there was a lady to see him, a lady who wouldn't give her name.

A wild hope caught at Jim's heart. He thought he had put relentlessly behind him the image of Mrs. Bligh, but there is no finality to visions, and what he saw now was a vision of Mrs. Bligh, repentant, kindly, ready once more to set his life to music. The very thought of her unloosed his spirit as if he had been tied to a stake.

He ran into his dusty, book-filled, little room, with his heart on a wave of ecstasy, but the figure which rose to meet him was not Mrs. Bligh.

Eliza looked precisely as she had done when she left him last in Trafalgar Square. She took the protective colour of her surroundings upon her so that she never seemed out of place. But though her appearance was unaltered, her behaviour was more cordial.

She turned her rather hard pink cheek for a fraternal kiss.

'Well,' she said with sisterly ease, 'this does seem a piece of all right, doesn't it? I've just heard of your legacy and I was wondering what you'd do with it. I'm glad you've taken my advice. There's nothing like education when you

can afford it, and what I say is, you can always have one kind or another if you put your mind to it. My word! What a queer place Cambridge is, isn't it? How much did old Mr. Atkinson leave you?'

Eliza asked this question without reproachfulness, but there was a shade in her manner which implied that she had more than a right to know.

After all, if she hadn't so conveniently left the field to Jim, their parts might have been reversed. He owed her something for her considerate flight.

Jim hesitated a moment before he said, 'Three hundred a year.' He said it a little dryly, for he saw it was all Eliza had come for. Then he asked her why she had never made him a sign for all these years? Eliza waived the question. She didn't say that, when she'd seen him last, he hadn't been worth it. She only looked around her at the simplicity of horse-hair sofas and antimacassars which still surrounded Jim's undiscerning path. Her eyes wandered over the pale blue vases on the mantelpiece, flanked by brown, undogmatic china animals before she said, 'That's all right for a single man, for a beginning. If you'll use sense you'll soon be in the way of earning more. I do better than this without an education.'

Jim hung his head. The memory of what Eliza did was always with him. He dreamed about it by night, and by day it entered into him and crushed him, so that he hesitated on the brink of his enthusiasms. Eliza's profession was the sharpest of his spiritual handicaps.

He was always asking himself if he hadn't, by his own violence, contributed to it.

If he hadn't broken up their home would Eliza have ever gone beyond her dreams of feather boas, into her admirable extractions?

He looked up from under his heavy brows and measured himself against Eliza.

Her eyes, shining and impenetrable, were set flatly in her head; they never changed their impersonal but friendly watchfulness. She knew that he wanted to change her life, but as long as the struggle between them was not physical, she knew, as she had known long ago in her swiftly developing girlhood, that she had nothing to fear.

Jim had only brute strength, which he was too soft to use; he was, as far as Eliza was concerned, negligible as a danger. She smiled at the gravity of his challenging eyes.

'What's wrong?' she asked lightly 'Are you too grand for me now?'

He put off the struggle with a sense of shame in his cowardice.

'I don't suppose I'm grand enough,' he said. 'What would you like to do? Take a look round Cambridge, now you're here—go on the river——?'

'The river'll do nicely,' said Eliza with decision. 'I saw quite enough of the place coming up from the station. Poky, that's what these old buildings are. I don't say one couldn't do something with all the flighty boys running about loose—but it's not in my line, of course. Besides, I shouldn't dream of interfering with you. I quite see we must stand or fall together.'

Jim held the door open for her. 'I'm glad to hear you say that,' he observed a little grimly. 'It's what I've been thinking of myself, but we'll wait to talk over what we mean by it till we get to a more private place.'

Eliza nodded in a friendly way. She tripped between the historic walks with unseeing eyes. She, too, had a point to make. Occasionally she shot a glance at the man beside her. He still wasn't as smart as he might have been. His clothes were badly cut, he walked like a man who has done manual work. But he had improved greatly. He wasn't so different from the other bareheaded youths who passed them, not without glances of admiration for Jim's companion, which Eliza returned with her discreet, furtive eyes narrowed a little, but full of wavering light.

Eliza was young, and she enjoyed her youth. She calculated what it brought her in, with the least possible expenditure of power.

She was a woman, and that too was an asset. But she did nothing to obtrude her sex upon her companion. She knew better than that with Jim. She merely hoodwinked him with ease until they reached the river.

The willows, gold and thin, leaned low on the banks.

They had nothing behind them but the sky—deep into the water their reflections flung back at them an answering life.

The flat, low lands which had crouched and clenched themselves away under the breath of the long winter winds lay relaxed and green now, with buttercups in a flood of golden bronze spread above them.

Far away across the plain the cliff of Ely rose with its cathedral like a gray tethered cloud, launched into the sky. It was an autumn day with no movement in it but the infrequent fall of leaves and the swift, short flights of robins, shaking out their sweet and fitful songs.

Jim found a boat and pulled out silently on to the stream.

Eliza leaned back against the cushions with a curious movement of relaxation.

'Eliza,' Jim said at last, 'I'm glad you've come here. I'm glad you said you wanted us to act together. It's been on my mind like all these years. I have an idea. I daresay it sounds nonsense to you, but I can't work it out without you. I want to stand for people like we were—without a chance. You know how it was. Girls like you with no education, and fathers like ours. Well, it was bound to tell on us—it did me, in one way, and you another. But we can get out again. I won't say much about religion; it hasn't come your way, perhaps, but it's what made me feel there was a way out. There's people, too, who think they haven't got any religion, and have enough to try to help others. That's what I'm after. Education shows one how to do things, and how to make other men do them. I'll get all I can.

'When I'm finished will you give up your way of life and help me?'

'I don't believe I've ever been in a row-boat before,' Eliza remarked reflectively, 'except once on the Serpentine of a summer evening. There were some people about then. It's a bit too quiet for my taste on this river.'

'You and I,' Jim persisted, 'ought to be pals. I haven't had a pal—not for a long time. Have you?'

Eliza answered this question. 'I don't know that I have,' she said, 'except as you might say, professionally, and these I trust just as far as I can see them.'

'Do you trust me?' Jim asked urgently.

'I don't suppose I should be sitting here if I didn't,' said Eliza cautiously. 'I know you'll not give me away.'

'No, I suppose I shan't do that,' Jim agreed reluctantly. 'But I don't like your way of life, Eliza, I don't like it at all. You're clever enough to get on and yet play square—why don't you do it?'

'That's where you're mistaken,' said Eliza equably. 'I hadn't any capital except my wits. Work wouldn't have kept me in gloves. It doesn't. What about you—and you're a man? You were working when I saw you last, weren't you? Well, your hands weren't even clean.'

Jim flinched before Eliza's recollection. He didn't want to make a personal protest—personal protests weaken argument, but he wished to explain to her why his hands hadn't been clean.

'Still,' he said at last, 'I'd rather work on anyhow and keep straight. It pays in the long run.'

Eliza shook her head. 'There's straight people in the workhouse now,' she observed. 'I don't say there aren't crooked ones too, but anyhow they've had their good times.'

'I don't believe you have such a good time,' said Jim firmly. 'You look like a chased cat. Anyhow, don't you believe in right and wrong, Eliza?'

'I don't know what you mean by believe in it,' said Eliza defensively. 'I know I'll go to prison if I'm caught out, if that's what you mean.

'It's quite true it's an exhausting life; now and again I do get tired, but you'd have to make it worth my while to drop it.'

Jim was silent; something in his flesh and blood was as wounded by Eliza as if he had been personally attacked. Virtue had gone out of him, but it was not transferred. Eliza had started some spiritual leak in his soul, which left him weakened and bereft of words.

'What would be worth your while?' he said at last without looking up at her.

'Five hundred a year,' said Eliza promptly, 'with what I've managed to save, would be worth my while, not less.'

'I haven't got it,' said Jim desperately, 'and if I had I

wouldn't give it to you. What's the use of bribing you to keep straight?'

'I'm sure I don't know if you don't,' said Eliza serenely.

'I'd like to get out of being ashamed, that's all,' Jim muttered, 'and I don't want to see you nabbed, and one of these days you will be nabbed—you know that as well as I do. But it isn't prison that matters most; it's the thing, the dirty thing, that puts you there.'

Jim spat into the river.

He could not express his loathing of dishonesty; it rose up and overwhelmed him, like the knowledge of some horrible physical disease.

'I don't say I don't like being honest myself,' said Eliza calmly, after a short pause. 'All I say is, I can't afford it. You can't either, it seems. Well, then, it's no use making a fuss about what you can't help, is it? I've had a nice quiet afternoon anyway, and now I'd like my tea. Do you think it would go too much against your principles to lend me a tenner? I've got to get to Glasgow to-morrow, and my pal's left me uncommonly short.'

'I thought you said,' Jim grumbled, 'that you'd got capital put away?'

'So I have,' said Eliza, 'but not in the way you mean. It's stones, and they have to go on to the market carefully. Just now wouldn't suit me to sell at all.'

Jim continued to grumble, but before they had got back he produced the ten-pound note. Eliza fingered it thoughtfully. It had just been worth her while to come down to Cambridge.

Jim gave her a very handsome tea in a teashop full of innocent, admiring young men.

Jim's mouth had a good-natured twist, and his eyes met Eliza's in a friendly twinkle when he heard one of these deluded boys referring to her in an undertone as an angel. Eliza looked reflective; she came to the conclusion that she had better, some day, come back to Cambridge by herself.

Jim saw her to the station, and on to the train with a curious sinking at his heart.

He had asked for real life, and now even before his work upon books was over, real life had broken through and granted

his request. It was a hard and heavy substance, and Jim was conscious that he hadn't done very much with it. In some curious but perfectly final way it was he himself who yielded to this experience. He found, as he walked back to his lodgings, that he had decided not to stay up and try for a fellowship. He had singularly failed in his effort to convert Eliza, but he could not accept a life which had nothing to do with Eliza's.

CHAPTER XXIV

JIM came back to London one dull November day, ready for his life-work.

There was no light, and the taste of fog was in the air.

The massive unconcern of London struck him like a blow.

Nobody wanted him or his knowledge; nobody wanted change; those who needed it most clung with the steadiness of limpets to the invisible rocks of their unsavoury habits.

Jim's instinct took him to the river, down by the gray, unlighted miles of docks.

A region of narrow streets, and squalid, small houses swallowed him up, and only his landlady took a feeble interest in him, founded on rent.

When he went to see labour leaders and put his ideas before them he was looked upon suspiciously as if he wanted to get something out of them.

They looked at his hands and shut him out of their counsels. Labour was sullen and hostile in those days, before the shilly-shallying of intellectual freaks; they had been taken in so often by the devil appearing as an angel of light; and in the end they had found they always had to pay for the light.

Jim found himself as disconnected as a stray cat. His speech betrayed him; only a jaded but enthusiastic parson, buried in an enormous parish of poverty and spiritual apathy, gave him a sympathetic but scarcely encouraging word.

'You may be able to do something,' he said wistfully to Jim. 'My profession is like the mark of the beast. They look at my clerical collar and sheer off. No wonder St. Paul was a tentmaker first and a preacher afterwards. I visit and do what I can for the young. Religion bores the men, and the women are too overworked to come to church.

'You see how they live. It's the life of nomads, without the climate—all these miles of dock and no centre for them to

tell them where work is to be found—they wander and migrate like the birds—only without a plan.

'I can't alter anything. I'm a hobbled horse. People like you, perhaps, may do something, but I doubt it. Power is in the hands of money. St. John the Baptist couldn't drag prominent people into the desert to listen to him now. They wouldn't even bother about cutting off his head.'

Jim listened, and went away convinced that the church couldn't help him, or herself. There was no backing in her for revolution, and no life possible without revolt.

It was five years since Jim had worked with his hands.

He went down to the docks to look for work. It was a slack time, and he had to wait for two weeks before he got taken on.

Jim hated taking the job when it came, for he was safe, and the men fighting and scrambling in the queue behind him were not safe.

But it was no use waiting for some one who could afford to miss a chance.

They all stood without a margin, with their eyes fixed on luck.

When luck failed them they sank like stones, and bitter waters closed over their heads.

Jim felt drowned with each man who went under, but he wouldn't drown dumb. He spoke, and the men listened to him at last, for he was one of themselves now. He was acquainted with their infirmities. He poured out his scorn on the England who held her children so cheap that she could not give them work. He joined the Docker's Union, and fed their meetings with his reasoned, inflammatory anger.

His brain was on fire, and the heavy, mechanical day's work left him free to think.

He left no secrecy about his past. He told the dockers who he was and what he had done. It was not such an unusual story told to such an audience, but what Jim had made of it afterwards was unusual. He poured out to them his motives for the future. He wanted to get better wages, shorter hours, more centralization, more control of these mysterious docks; they loaded and unloaded for capricious and invisible powers.

He had all their sympathy for his passion and his resentment against the conditions of labour, but he wanted more than better conditions. He wanted, with the same passion, with the same vitriolic, practical invective, a scheme of things by which the free hours and added incomes would not be thrown away. Jim wanted to lift character. The men were puzzled by this attitude. They could understand an agitator or a parson, or even one or two noted men on the dockers' side, who were priests and called themselves fathers and had combined the two attributes, but these infrequent visitors had vanished. They had stood for a while with a mysterious church behind them, into which they had finally withdrawn, a dream, which was as foreign to the life of a docker as a bird-cage in the life of a wild bird.

But Jim had no church behind him, and he was one of themselves.

He spoke out-doors and in public houses, and finally, as the weather grew worse and his audiences larger, he hired a room and gave night classes and Sunday lectures in it. The Sunday lectures were a curious blend of revolt against material pressure and discipline for the climbing soul. Indiscreet and challenging, they were flung, formless and alive, on to the raw attention of the men.

They did not flatter the dockers, but they interested them. They took a light straight into each man's soul and held it there.

The little room grew crowded out and gave place to an empty factory.

Jim was one of the most important speakers for the union by then, and he hoped to see it run on French syndicalist lines. He did not believe in any compromise with capital. Compromises were only safe with equal partners. The powers of the employers were still too great. They had behind them riches, education, newspapers, the church, the state, and the army, with a front as solid as a cathedral. The men had only their numbers and their necessities. Unity could give them power, and it was for unity that Jim struggled. Unity and the overthrow of personal selfishness.

He had to give up his dock labour to devote himself to his union and his weekly talks.

He handed the empty factory over to a committee, the men ran it and paid for it. Jim only spoke in it.

He was responsible for nothing but his own ideas.

It was as if the birds of the air carried them about, and brought him in a harvest. Men who remembered his name from the university debating society, offered to take over night classes and run boys' clubs and holiday funds for him. A Mr. and Mrs. Hodgkins, two devout and free-thinking young people, came down to Poplar to live near him as independent workers under his guidance.

Jim saw them, trembled before the fixed eyes and unmodulated opinions of Mrs. Hodgkins, and loved the thin, feverish face of her young husband. They talked to him in turn, steadily and for hours; he saw they looked on the millennium in the light of a model tenement house, where all the inhabitants would clothe themselves in blue serge bloomers, irrespective of sex, and eat cheese. But he saw, too, that they loved human beings. Before they had finished talking, Jim had handed over to them the organisation of his surprising church.

He had not meant it to be a church, but Mr. and Mrs. Hodgkins persuaded him that it was. They told him they were prepared to be called the Rev. and Mrs. Hodgkins, and to be Jim's assistant ministers.

'Well,' Jim replied, when Mr. Hodgkins ceased to expound his innocent, thin daydreams, and Mrs. Hodgkins relieved him for a moment from her more fixed and sanitary plans, 'Be what you like, only remember I'm Jim Barton, and I am never going to be anything else. I don't mind what you do to the factory as long as the committee run the accounts. It's the people's church (if it is a church) not mine. They elect the committee and have a general meeting every six months.

'They can turn me out at any moment, and they must be able to do the same with you. Meanwhile, I speak every Sunday night at seven. I say what I like, and you can do the same. But you must remember they are equally at liberty to object to it. If you take my advice, you won't say anything about women wearing bloomers and men not eating

meat. Because these kind of things aren't going to happen yet in Poplar.'

The Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Hodgkins agreed to go slowly and build up public opinion. They stopped the factory being called a factory, and named it Calvary Church.

The committee was a little restive at first, but Mrs. Hodgkins magnetised them. She wore a cassock and a mortar board and bought a brass eagle.

She told the committee that they had everything in their hands, and then proceeded to put into their heads what their hands should perform. The committee soon began to like the ideas with which she provided them. They chose an altar and a pulpit; they replaced a harmonium by an organ, and told Jim he must stop using a chair and sitting in the middle of them.

They got proper chairs in tidy rows instead of backless benches, and in the end they had red hassocks.

Everything became more like everything else and much more comfortable.

They hired a real organist who liked anthems instead of a shoemaker who could only play, 'Dare to be a Daniel.'

The most important members of the congregation with adequate lung power went into the choir and wore surplices and cassocks.

Jim took no apparent notice of any of these changes. He agreed to the cassocks, which he found very uncomfortable, but not even Mrs. Hodgkins could prevail upon him to wear a stole.

'You are a priest in the eyes of God,' Mrs. Hodgkins reminded him firmly, 'for ever—after the order of Melchisidek.'

'Still, he didn't wear a stole,' Jim objected, 'and I don't need to remind God what I am. It's no use setting up church people's backs for a little thing like a stole. You wait a bit, we shall have heavier jobs than stoles to fight about before we're through.'

Mrs. Hodgkins shook her head gloomily. She was one of Jim's most devoted disciples, but at the bottom of her heart she wished he was different; he had no eye for the external. It seemed to Mrs. Hodgkins that if her husband

had had a stronger throat and continued to do exactly as she told him, he would have made a better preacher than Jim.

London slowly awoke to the existence of Calvary.

It seemed there was a remarkable man who preached in Poplar and who wasn't a proper clergyman at all.

There were packed services three times a day, on the lines of a refined and up-to-date Church of England.

The Service of Benediction had been lifted from the Church of Rome by Mrs. Hodgkins with a lightness of hand worthy of Eliza. There was a great deal of popular music, and the social side of the work had the effect of a mosquito upon the Local Government Board. It sang songs of triumph, stung, and wouldn't keep still enough to be killed.

The committee ran the financial side of the church, and the people ran the committee, but Mrs. Hodgkins ran everything else, including Jim.

Jim knew that she ran him. He realised that he hadn't meant to have a church, and that now he had one, and that he hadn't meant to be any kind of a clergyman, and now he was some kind of a one.

But he was the vice-president of the Dockers' Union, too, and he still said what he liked.

This was a great achievement, but Jim was not universally popular. If he had not been a great orator nobody would have listened to him.

His mistake was that he saw there wasn't any side which was wholly in the right. He wouldn't flatter the people he loved at the expense of the people they hated. He had to speak the truth, and it cost him many disciples.

When he fought against poor wages, long hours and interference with personal liberty, he could count on his influence over those he fought for; but when he turned on them the same shafts of indignation and ridicule, to eradicate evils at least as deep in their lives and his own, he met with no support.

No one in Poplar wanted to see that Christianity is just as much against hostility, unfairness and tyranny in poor people as it is against these characteristics in the rich, and that what it really requires is an abolition of personal selfishness.

The people of Calvary Church wanted to be told that they were the elect. They knew they were being respectable against heavy odds, and they thought this ought to be enough.

They resented being told that respectability wasn't Christianity, and they didn't want the 'Down and Outers' in the church at all.

'If they go, I go,' Jim said grimly. 'If you've got an ex-convict for a minister you ought to be able to put up with a few criminals in the congregation.'

But after all, Jim couldn't be everywhere at once, and 'Down and Outers,' those rare, shy birds, fugitively won from the placid nursery of their sins, fled back to them at the first sign of the righteous cold shoulders of their brothers. They came to Jim by night, for bread and love; but they didn't want anything else.

There were men he had struggled to save and gone down with when they sank; there were women he had protected and rescued from an old and ready bondage.

They came to Jim because they knew his compassion was without judgment. They felt that all he wanted was to share their bad times, and give them his strength for their unequal fights. Even when they couldn't fight, something in him helped them.

His door was always open, day and night. It caused a great deal of scandal. Mrs. Hodgkins told Jim he ought to consider the weaker brother. Jim looked at her reflectively. 'Not before the weakest,' he said quietly. Mrs. Hodgkins said no more, but she started a night shelter for women.

Jim did what he could to get them to go to it, but most of them were afraid of shelters.

When they could be persuaded to go, Mrs. Hodgkins managed them much better than Jim.

Jim didn't understand women. He wanted them to be free and safe; but free first.

Mrs. Hodgkins gave them good hot tea and told them how wicked they were; and that was what they had expected.

There was a good deal of talk about getting Jim out of Poplar. The clergyman of the parish, who had been happily asleep for thirty years, woke up suddenly and strongly ob-

jected to the presence of a building called 'Calvary,' which was full, three hundred yards away from a church called St. Botolph's, which was empty.

Bishops objected. Some tactless person from the west end hearing that Jim's landlord was about to turn him out of Calvary, paid a fancy price for the site and handed it over to the committee.

There was nothing further for the authorities to do then, except to say how disgraceful it was, and wait for Jim to do something illegal.

When fashionable people read the small paragraphs in the paper about how disgraceful Jim was, they flocked to hear him.

Jim's mordant wit became extremely popular in the west end, and his passion was as stirring as a play. People even wanted to meet him, especially when they found he had no wife, and wouldn't accept their invitations.

But Jim did not keep this section of his admirers very long.

The first great dock strike branded him. This wasn't only an amusing man who made Christianity thrilling. He was one of those dreadful people who come to bring not peace but a sword. He not only attacked people's souls, but their interests.

It ceased to be bishops who thundered against Jim now; it was the whole class from which bishops spring.

Jim had prepared for the strike for years. He had devoted his whole energy into increasing the Union and its supplies, and had studied with secrecy and passion the points in the armour of the shipowners. When he struck, he struck hard and formidably.

It was a terrible and embittering time. Inconvenient for the shipowners and merchants, and devastating for the dockers themselves.

Famine, illness, and awful lassitude seized the miles of small gray houses, seized and shook the heart out of them for nine long weeks.

Then the strike was broken. The powers against them, outraged and well-handled, were too strong.

There was no general co-operation of labour to come to their help.

Their comrades in other trades watched their struggle with

sullen eyes, in which sympathy was powerless to overcome the timidity of centuries.

They watched a great fire kindle, flicker, and die out.

The strike was broken, but not the spirit which made it. The dockers had not been able to get what they wanted, but they had shaken power.

Jim laughed when he read Mr. Egerton's invitation to dinner. It was a grim laugh, for he had not had a dinner for some time—all his resources were stretched to the uttermost, and he never took more than would just keep him going.

'They're frightened,' he said to himself. 'Good—well, so are we, but we shan't show it, and they have—this card is as good as a white feather. I can hear them saying, "We must get hold of the man, he's dangerous." Well, I've got to be dangerous, but if I meet them I shall know better, perhaps, just how dangerous I have got to be.'

Jim spoke with the pleasant zeal of one who is prepared to meet his enemies on their own ground, and without any presentiment that he might be called upon to face a far more difficult problem—the presence of a friend in the house of his enemies.

CHAPTER XXV

VIOLA EGERTON was as interested in life as a well-cared for kitten. She did not want to get to the end of her ball of wool; but she loved tangling it up.

She wanted to destroy a little, tease a little, explore a great deal, and play imaginary games in an imaginary jungle, without being too much interfered with by reality. She chased her own tail with ardour, and she thought, when she had succeeded in catching it, she would have done something very handsome.

She did not wish to be too different from other people. Viola was afraid of the spark of imagination which pushed her beyond the hedges of her upbringing, and she was even more afraid of the tides of young generosity which threatened to make her ridiculous by their intensity.

She didn't want to make people think she was tiresome and clever any more than that she was innocent and dull. Above everything she wanted to be considered modern; to be like some of the girls she knew—audacious, a little hard, without continuity, and knowing rapidly and thoroughly what they wanted.

These young people went their own way and were not easily upset.

Viola Egerton knew that she did not possess these qualities. She wavered even over what she wanted, her judgment slid away from application, and more often than not she went other people's way, because she liked pleasing them better than she liked pleasing herself.

Above all, she liked to please her mother. Mrs. Egerton was as charming when she was pleased as a warm day in spring, and she was as inclement as the edge of an east wind when people were careless, or wilful enough to displease her.

She had been an indulgent mother, but there had always

been something behind her indulgence which could not be trifled with. She let her two children do what they liked after she had chosen it.

Harry never found this out. When his mother had moulded him into the precise form she thought a young man of his station should present, she let him go on at his own momentum, and Harry went on, serenely, selfishly, and above all safely, under the impression that he was exercising his own free will.

But Viola had qualms. She had recognised even as a child that when her heart was set upon an inconvenient mongrel puppy, her mother had instantly presented her with a magnificent wax doll; and it had not been precisely the same thing to her.

But she only once openly defied her mother. She wanted to read *Ann Veronica,* every one was saying that it was a dreadful book and ought never to be read by young girls. Almost every girl in Viola's set read it, and most of them thought they were potential Ann Veronicas, though perhaps more intelligent. Mrs. Egerton said when she saw it in Viola's hands, 'Oh, that tiresome book. I shouldn't bother about it——' and *Ann Veronica* mysteriously disappeared, a sapphire blue leather bound volume of *An English Woman's Love Letters* taking its place. Viola went out, bought another copy of *Ann Veronica,* read it with flaming cheeks and an uneven heart, and took it to her mother. 'I wanted to read it after all,' she said defiantly, 'and I went and bought it.'

Mrs. Egerton said, 'Did you, darling? What a pity. There is a copy somewhere in the house. I'm afraid it must have bored you dreadfully.'

The worst of it was that Viola couldn't feel like Ann Veronica. Nobody defied her to go to balls; on the contrary, they brought round padded motors and took her.

Neither of her parents were ever rude to her, or ordered her about, and it is much more difficult to rebel against velvet than against violence.

As soon as Viola's education was finished, her mother said to her, 'Dearest, you're the greatest friend I have in the world. It would break my heart if, because we're two grown up women in one house. We didn't get on.

'I purpose to share all my pleasures with you and all my confidence—and whatever you choose to tell me in return shall be kept secret. We will talk over all you want to do, so that I shan't make any mistakes.'

They did talk it over, and most of Viola's inspirations evaporated; but on the whole what replaced them was more inspiring still. Mrs. Egerton was as good as her word; she gave her daughter her confidence; that is to say, she told her what she thought it would be good for her to know, and she made it extremely amusing.

Other girls in Viola's set went out more alone and were tasting the delights of new-won social freedom. Viola was anxious to reproduce their liberty in her own life, but when it came to the point, Mrs. Egerton raised her charming eyebrows, and said with laughing, experienced eyes,—

'But you don't want to get kissed by young men in cabs, do you, darling?'

And Viola wasn't quite modern enough to say that she did. She could only stammer and grow red, and look silly, and decide that no liberty was worth having at the price of having to meet her mother's amused wise eyes, while she was using it.

Viola had with acuteness, the sensitiveness of the untried. No young girl can explain easily that she wants to learn what older women know. She wishes to appear to know already. She wishes not to know exactly, but to be possessed of the adroitness which comes with knowledge; above all she wishes to escape being watched while she is finding out.

Viola, more sensitive than most, made a swift retreat into her ignorance.

She was allowed plenty of friends of her own age, but her mother was always her most intimate companion, she was like an enchanting elder sister. She laughed at Viola very little, and never before any one else, and she gave her a sense of enormous social ease.

Her wisdom and experience were like skilful tools, ready to slip into her daughter's nervous hands at every crisis.

Mrs. Egerton never used anything she possessed against Viola; her wit, her knowledge of the world, even her still

splendid beauty—were not rivals to her daughter's gifts—they were always reinforcements.

She had been a noted beauty in her day, and no one would have known that it was over, if she had not so placidly asserted it. Only Mrs. Egerton herself knew that her placidity and her renunciation were but the cloak of an ambition—as bitter as salt, and as hot as flame.

She had failed to do what she wanted with her own life, but she had determined to do it with her daughter's.

Harry was perfectly useless. He would never give his mother any trouble; he was her husband over again, a decent, reliable, pleasant fellow, without a leader's eyes or hands.

He would not lose money, and when he died (which would probably be not before eighty) he would never be heard of again.

Mrs. Egerton had wanted power and a great name. She had believed at eighteen that Tom Egerton, who was very handsome and had just won a fortune out of a peculiarly brilliant stroke of business, was capable of presenting her with what she wanted.

He couldn't become an ambassador because he was not a linguist, but he might, if carefully run, become anything else. He talked a great deal and men listened to him; he almost always said what the men of his own class were thinking—and he never said what they weren't. Unfortunately, Tom's shipping deal had really been the work of a common young under-manager, whom the firm had to get rid of, because he wanted to be made a director and had no capital beyond his brains.

Tom never did anything brilliant afterwards, but he went on making a good deal of money regularly and thinking that it was, on the whole, due to him that the money was made.

He did not realise that money follows money as duck follows duck, and his increasing fortune looked very like brains—coming in, in large quantities, fairly easily, and not going out again, because he always had the sense not to do anything silly with it.

Tom couldn't see what more his wife wanted. He was very much in love with her, and for the first five years of their married life he met her efforts to rouse him into political

leadership, by kindred efforts of his own. He puffed himself out like the frog who wanted to be thought a bullock, but he had just enough commonsense to stop in time to prevent any serious explosion. If a command of platitude, and a modest sense of self-importance were enough to have made Tom a Cabinet Minister, there is no doubt he would have become one. He believed in himself and he believed in all the causes which support such a self, but he wasn't as a speaker, infectious.

He tried twice for a seat, failed with a too obvious majority against him, and retired from public life with the knowledge that his wife thought him a fool.

He was not the type of man who can go on being in love with a woman who thinks him a fool; but he always admired her, and he never did anything at all desperate.

He liked his home, his children and his business; he managed his cellars excellently and was a delightful host.

What he did with his private life was his own affair; he could afford discretion.

Mrs. Egerton never failed to be perfectly polite to her husband, and perfectly indifferent to him. She spent a great deal of money, but it was thoroughly well spent; and her conduct was irreproachable.

She often used to say with her wistful, two-edged smile, 'I am the Early Victorian wife and mother, you know. I have no life outside my poor little home.'

They had a house in Grosvenor Square and one in the country.

No trainer ever studied a prospective favourite for the Derby with more watchful precautionary care than Mrs. Egerton gave to her only daughter.

She played for Viola's sensitive, imaginative heart as great men play for kingdoms; and the child loved her, responded to her, and grew very much what her mother had hoped; but Mrs. Egerton was not wholly sure of her.

What in herself was a pleasant, romantic sentiment which often led her to be very sorry for people when she could do nothing to help them, had the dangerous element of intensity in Viola. Mrs. Egerton was a well-bred woman and she never told unnecessary lies, but she did not carry conclusions when

they were too heavy to be comfortable, she put them down; and there were moments when she thought Viola did not know when to let unpleasant conclusions drop. She was an inconveniently truthful child, and she was never silly in the right place.

Even Viola's humour was more intelligent for her age than was at all advisable.

It might bring quite suitable young men up too short.

But these were faults of youth, and she was too lovely not to be easily forgiven.

Viola had not inherited her mother's splendid regularity of features, but she had got her clear olive skin, the beauty of the lines of her small head superbly carried, the delicate curve of her chin, and eyebrows which had the fine, firm lightness of a butterfly's wings. The eyes beneath them were not as brilliant as Mrs. Egerton's; they were a shade darker and their expression was tentative and candid. Viola hadn't anything to hide, and she had a great deal to learn. Men thought them charming eyes.

She was much smaller than her mother; nature had finished her off with the same attention to detail; her hands were like white pointed flowers, her feet and ankles had never needed the implacable care with which her mother had treated them.

Mrs. Egerton left nothing in her daughter's appearance to chance or nature. She despised people who leave well alone, when with a little attention to detail they could make it better.

No girl in London was as well turned out as Viola Egerton. She was as actually strong, and as fragile looking, as a briar rose. She could have stood any exposure, but she looked as if she had never been exposed. She did not have freckles, colds or nerves.

Viola herself was perfectly unconscious of the processes applied to her. She accepted cold cream for her skin, drank barley water when she would have preferred tea, and enjoyed regular and delightful exercise without thinking about these practices. She supposed she was clean and tidy like everybody else.

Viola never discovered that she was as much a work of art as one of Leonardo's faintly smiling women; nor that

secretly in her mother's mind there was the same high price attached to her.

It was true that a casual glance from a pair of masculine eyes—and all Mrs. Egerton's care might be thrown away. The point of Viola's life must be marriage, and after she had made her beautiful, Mrs. Egerton knew that she still had the harder task in front of her, of making her beauty safe.

Fortunately she had already avoided the worst pitfalls. Viola showed no genius. She had not even any very strong tastes.

She had had the best teachers in Europe, and she sang in a perfectly trained, sweet, small voice, and danced nearly as well as she had been taught. She took to perfection in dress as naturally as a bee to lavender. She hadn't much time for reading, and read what was in the house.

All the slighter dangers of the roused intellect had been successfully escaped, but there was always the more acute danger of personal friends. Mrs. Egerton had her house full of the right kind of men, and Viola had talked to them from childhood without apparent supervision. The Egertons received as many other women as Mrs. Egerton considered necessary. She did not like other women, but when they had to be there they were there; and she was perfectly charming to Viola's girl friends.

With infinite skill and precaution she managed to prevent any deep intimacy between Viola and these young persons.

When Viola showed too marked an inclination for 'dear Maud' she found herself more and more thrown with 'dear Edith,' and if 'dear Edith' threatened to be at all tiresome, she faded without any apparent reason into 'dear Mabel.'

The Suffrage question was for a time a direct menace, but Mrs. Egerton handled it from the first with supreme skill. She behaved as if the women who wanted a vote suffered from the same serious disability to attract which is supposed to haunt the unmarried. Attractive women did not need to clamour for either a vote or a husband. What they wanted happened without any legal stir. She refused to take the subject seriously. 'I know, dear,' she said to Viola. 'Suffragettes are the most dreadful nuisance, and anti-Suffragettes are worse. I think we won't let people bore us over them.' And

she made a rule that no discussion on the question should ever be allowed in her house.

Viola felt indefinably relieved by the shelving of this painful subject. She wanted to think the vote didn't matter, because she knew that if it did she, too, ought to go white-faced and trembling to noisy meetings, and walk with tired feet over the London streets. She even wondered whether the whole question wasn't so extreme as to make law-breaking less an enormity than some of the laws hastily devised against it. At a word of positive opposition she would have hoisted her colours and known what they were.

But Mrs. Egerton said she thought that women would probably get the vote in the end, if enough of them wanted it sufficiently, and could have got it long ago if half a dozen really charming women hadn't been able to get a great deal more without bothering. But what these poor dears who were making such a fuss didn't realise was that a vote in itself was really worth nothing at all, except perhaps to quite poor people. It took the edge off sacrifice to think that if you gave everything you had, and did everything you didn't want to do, you would get nothing at all for it.

The Egertons went to Egypt for the worst winter, and in the summer Viola was nineteen and received her first proposal. It was a most satisfactory offer: ten thousand a year and a baronetcy of a quite respectable date.

Mrs. Egerton was not a vulgar woman, but she felt the same secret thrill of triumph with which a careful cat greets its kitten's first mouse.

She took Viola's refusal perfectly calmly. It was a very fine mouse, but she had not meant it to be final.

Sir Edgar Milton was an excellent match; but he wasn't anything else. He had an engaging manner and the brains of a healthy schoolboy of fifteen. He wanted Viola as if she was cake, and cried when she refused him.

Viola cried as well; she cried a great deal too much; it even gave her mother a momentary pang of uneasiness as to whether a kitten of so remorseful a type would make a satisfactory mouser?

Viola's next refusal was a man of the world. Bertram Montague had had a career with women, and a more inspiring

and less erratic career in the House. He was the kind of man who may still, if it is made reasonably easy, do something remarkable.

Viola was flattered by his attentions and a little afraid of him. He was very clever with her, and she nearly accepted him because he made it seem as if there was no alternative. But something in his eyes at the last moment made her feel like a creature close to a trap. She ran away from him literally, and was very much ashamed of herself afterwards.

She didn't cry after that refusal, but she felt very much relieved.

Mrs. Egerton thought two refusals were enough. She had a long, quiet talk with Viola, and she made her feel, without hurting her feelings, that to go on refusing nice, kind men, who would make perfectly good husbands, wouldn't be considerate or even very well-bred.

'Of course there's no reason in the world why you should marry, my pet,' she said tranquilly. 'I never can see why to be an old maid should always seem a little ridiculous and left out, particularly as such very plain women marry, and sometimes such extremely pretty ones don't; but if you've really made up your mind to avoid marriage, it would be kinder, wouldn't it, to a little more avoid men?'

Mrs. Egerton didn't point out how, in a house that was practically always full of them, they were to be avoided. She only smiled caressingly and said, 'There is nothing in the world your father and I want less than to get rid of you, dearest.'

Viola knew that she had an ideal home, but she wanted sometime or other to get out of it, and of course she didn't want to be unkind.

So when the third applicant came she accepted him. He was young, handsome, intelligent, and extravagantly in love with her. Viola really rather wanted to accept him. She thought it would be nice to go off alone together. It was always exciting when he came, and dull when he went.

She could do whatever she liked with him.

It was like owning a very intelligent dog who picks up tricks in a flash and never snaps at his biscuit till you say the word.

It was true that Viola was not sure that she wanted to

marry him, but then she wasn't sure that she wanted to marry any one, she was only sure that she didn't want not to be married at all.

This man was the kind of husband she had always meant to have. He was cleverer than she was; he knew all about politics and had real books she had never heard of. He held his own easily in the society of much older men.

He had a pleasant wit and the air of never being left behind. He, too, would give Viola that reassuring sense of social security which her mother gave her.

Perhaps he would give her more, and reassure her sometimes wondering sense of moral questions, a little overlooked in the pressure of daily life.

But though he was the kind of man Viola wanted, he wasn't the man himself. Nothing in her heart but pity responded to his pleading, burning eyes. Unfortunately she had a great deal of pity, and she did not know that pity can be cruel when it is given instead of love.

Mrs. Egerton comforted her by assuring Viola that love came gradually with nice women, and that the nicer they were the more gradually it came.

Her father said with even more than his usual confidence in his own judgment, 'What I like about him, my darling, is he's all right. You've chosen a white man.' His future son-in-law was the son of his co-director.

Harry kissed her and said she was a lucky girl, and he hoped she'd invite him to Scotland and make her husband buy a yacht. A marriage founded on these simple principles couldn't, in Harry's eyes, go very far wrong.

Viola put her hand on his shoulder and said thoughtfully, 'Harry, I wish I knew more about men,' and Harry chuckled and said, 'You will, old girl, you will,' but of course what Viola had meant was *first*.

No one had tried to influence her about her engagement. She wasn't being deceived or hoodwinked, no essential fact was kept from her.

She knew all about love; the only thing she had not had much opportunity of learning anything about was life.

CHAPTER XXVI

VIOLA stood in the doorway looking at Jim thoughtfully. She was wondering how she was going to talk for half an hour to a man who came to dinner in a blue serge suit.

Mr. Egerton had warned her that Jim Barton would be early, and that he wanted her to be particularly nice to him.

'The fellow can do me a great deal of harm,' he had explained, 'That's why I've asked him to dinner.

'He isn't any class at all and your mother's horrified. She never understands business. He's a tremendous speaker and does what he likes with my men; if I could get him to go easy with them for a bit we might avoid a strike—it'll be extremely inconvenient if they strike before Christmas. And very often a woman's tact, you know——'

Mr. Egerton trailed away on this tribute to woman, leaving Viola to fill out exactly what he meant by it.

Viola never pressed any of her father's points. She had an uneasy feeling that he wouldn't like the pressure, and that if she pressed hard enough she might not like the points.

Her father adored her, and she couldn't bear to imagine herself ashamed of him. Mr. Egerton was a man full of conscious superiority and the habits of command, but he was too much of a gentleman not to cover these qualities by an exaggerated air of deference as long as he wasn't being directly opposed. It would have been absurd to connect him with anything at all shabby.

And yet Viola often felt that all he had was unsubstantial, and that behind his safeties of possession and control ran a very small stream of spirit.

She felt instinctively that it wasn't quite fair to her, or even to a common man, to make her coax him into being accommodating. But she was going to do it. It would have been a more direct violence to Viola's sense of taste not to fall in with her father's plans. He counted on her to help him.

So she kissed him with an irritated tenderness, and refused to look her scruples in the face.

She guessed that what her father had meant by tact was that she should look particularly nice, so that she took a placid, unhurried hour to dress for the evening.

She wore a dress she had designed for herself; the bodice was a strip of filmy old lace, as light as foam, and the skirt came out all round her in the shape of a butterfly's wings, pale yellow and dark orange.

She wore her lover's emeralds, but with a sudden impulse she took them off and put nothing in their place.

'You're Mr. Barton, I think,' she said gently. 'Won't you sit down.'

The young man stood there staring at her with immense and curious blue eyes. He seemed unconscious of the need for him to do anything else, but at the sound of her voice he shook hands a little uncertainly and sat down on an uncomfortable chair; he made it look more uncomfortable by crossing his hands over his knees and leaning forward. It was a charming room, and Jim had been admiring it greatly before Viola came in; but he no longer saw it—the green brocade curtains, light as spring leaves against the background of old oak, faded away from him—he ceased to notice the shining splendour of the solid silver candle-sticks in their old cut glass brackets, or the Venetian leather screen with its dim and broken browns and golds.

Instead he saw, as his eyes met Viola's, a Kingfisher darting its jewelled flight across a sunny stream. Something as solid and as light pierced suddenly into his heart and would not fly away.

'I'm afraid I'm altogether too early,' he said humbly after a pause. 'I came on after a meeting. My home is in Poplar; it was too far to go back.'

'Poplar,' Viola repeated thoughtfully. She hadn't any idea where Poplar was—it might have been some little place in the north of Russia for all she knew to the contrary. 'Of course, much too far,' she agreed with a smile. 'But I'm very glad you came early—I wanted to talk to you, and I'm always shy when everybody is there and expecting me to behave properly. My father tells me you're like him—awfully

interested in working men. I want you to tell me all about them.'

Jim's eyes grew veiled, his heavy chin, a trifle underhung, swung forward, as he bent to answer her.

'I'm one of the working men myself,' he said; 'I'm not a bit like your father, and you ought to use a stronger word than interested. I'm involved in all their interests.'

She flushed under the weight of his contradiction. It gave her the braced, tingling feeling of a sudden plunge into cold water. It might, when you got used to it, be nice, but it took your breath away.

She had never talked to a man who treated her less as if she were a woman. Jim seemed to force her relentlessly away from her advantages of beauty and of sex. But it was not because her beauty failed to move him.

The last ten years of his life had been a perpetual struggle between Jim and the force of his passions; he was a man ridden by impulses and attractions, and he had taught himself to let the strongest of them be nothing but an incentive to put him on his guard.

'I don't know what you want to know about us,' he said with a sudden, keen, disarming smile, 'but there's no harm in your asking.'

Viola thought it a pity that a man with so nice a smile should speak as if he belonged to a class which she had been brought up to think was little better than criminal. She tried to cut him adrift from it.

'But you're educated,' she protested. 'You can't really have anything in common with people who don't think and read?'

'Oh, I'm on the other side of that barrier,' said Jim with his curious, twisted smile. 'I daresay if I'd got culture I might have lost my soul, but I stopped at education, and that only made me rather convinced to stick to my class. All the thought and reading in the world, Miss Egerton, aren't confined to the few clever people who have time to do them in. The rest of us pick up a thing or two!

'If you were to go to a working men's meeting you would discover that I'm rather below the average.'

'I don't think I should discover that,' said Viola. 'But I

thought working men never read anything but newspapers and spent their evenings in public houses?'

Jim groaned. 'There,' he said. 'You would think *that,* and you think we're ignorant! Why the working man who says the archbishop is walking about in boots paid for out of his pocket, doesn't know *less* what he's talking about! Of course we've none of us had much chance of education. Do you know the State closes its normal benefits in that direction at thirteen? But something can be done if you've a mind for it—and a good many of us have nowadays. Only it's hard not to get beaten out of the race by too heavy a load to start with. And you're right—drink's a curse! If public houses could only be made *more* public, with food and fun in them—but then the poor brewers would have to suffer, wouldn't they? And we all know about the widows and orphans who seem invariably to put their savings into beer. But it's just as much a mistake, even while we're keeping all the widows and orphans' heads out of water, by the drink monopoly, to suppose all working men drink as to suppose all pretty girls flirt—they don't, do they?'

Viola stiffened. This young man was not her equal, and he was behaving as if he was, while quite rightly asserting that he wasn't.

She put him in his place, but she did it gently. His eyes went on laughing, even after this uncomfortable operation had been successfully performed.

'It seems such a pity,' she said, ignoring what she thought he should not have said, 'that working men won't understand what is good for them.' She was going on, but Jim interrupted her.

'I suppose they're like the rest of us,' he said. 'They prefer what's attractive. It's not in me to blame them, Miss Egerton.'

Viola frowned a little.

'My father is always arranging lectures,' she went on steadily, 'and excellent classes for his men who want to come—but so few of them ever do.'

'Do you like lectures?' Jim asked with apparent submission. 'I always think they're rather like being told how to behave.'

The colour rose suddenly under Viola's clear, pale skin. He

was literally the only man who had ever made her blush. But she decided it was because he was the only man who had ever been rude to her.

'Sometimes,' she said coldly, 'even that is necessary.'

'Still,' said Jim with unshakable good humour, 'people won't pay a penny a night for it—or a shilling the course, I forget which. Wonderfully little if you get what you like, but an awful lot if you don't.'

Viola reminded herself that her mission was to conciliate, so she dropped the subject of lectures.

'I wonder,' she said, 'if you know, Mr. Barton, how much my father cares about his dockers? I think he would do anything for their good—and it seems such a mistake for you not to work together, doesn't it? I always think we lose so much force by our lack of unity.'

'If good was jam,' Jim answered, 'and your father could keep it in a cupboard and spoon it out regularly to the men, I believe he'd give them quite a lot.

'He's a benevolent despot, as I expect you are really, and you won't mind my saying that from my point of view they're the worst sort, because it's so hard to make up one's mind to do them in!'

'I don't see why you should suppose that necessary,' objected Viola, 'if you admit we're benevolent.'

'Oh, but good's not jam,' said Jim. 'It's something men ought to get for themselves if their conditions enable them to do it, and if not, they've got to alter the conditions, and while the conditions are being altered benevolent despots will have to rip. Unfortunately the process of ripping is extremely painful; and, naturally enough, the benevolent despots think it awfully wrong. What they can't understand is that the sacredness of a good position is only felt by the people who have it.

'Look at your father, for instance. It's very difficult for him, because he's made the conditions, to see that they need altering. They fit him all right, and while he's kindly supplying his jam there we are trying to pull the ground from under his feet! I'm afraid it isn't likely that we can act together, Miss Egerton.'

Viola tried to steady her mind to answer him, but her

wits felt like scattered birds, and all the while something in her answered him—his eyes had the sparkle of a frosty morning, and the force behind them invaded her like the drive of the sea.

She shifted her ground with a sense of a precarious foothold.

'Think of what my father gives,' she said eagerly. 'His contribution is not to be compared to the men's—he gives his capital and his brains; and he takes all the risks. A big shipping business with its cut-throat competition, and its constant accidents, is an immense responsibility. He knows better than the men under what conditions it can be profitably run, and it is not fair to speak as if his perfectly reasonable returns make the conditions of his men's work harder. He has to study the trade as a whole, and you forget, while they get their wages paid exactly the same, he has the losses as well as the gains for his share of the business.'

The laughter died out of Jim's eyes. She saw for the first time the hard, fighting look which made him a formidable and not too merciful antagonist.

He did not answer her at once. Indeed for a moment he had forgotten her.

His eyes saw instead the row upon row of small gray houses, interminable and monotonous, about the distant docks. The sunk, drab life of the men he lived amongst, the pallor and ugliness of their youth, which had been built for strength and beauty, shook his heart. The thought of the neglected, tired children crying in the gutters and the dust, made bitter lines come into his hard young face.

'Oh, you don't see,' he said in a different tone. 'You can't see. You're not looking straight.

'You talk of what men like your father put into their businesses—but you don't reckon what they take out of them!

'All we want, we others, is to be in a position to put in as much. We'd stand our chance of the losses; you don't live on the edge of nothing and fear losses. What we want is to have leisure enough, quiet enough, comfort enough, to make our brains *tell*. You see, it's waste for a man to have his brain pinched out of him, by dirt and bad air, and the food which comes from such conditions. You say, look what

your father gives—but have you thought what we do? We give toil. We don't live far off from the Godforsaken mud flats where the docks have to be, in a house like this, to have our times off in comfort. We don't start work at ten after a breakfast as big as all our meals put together, and a thousand times more nourishing, and we don't go to a luxurious office in a motor car, and sit for a few hours giving orders, with clean hands, from a leather arm-chair.

'A man's toil is himself, and when we've used ourselves up for the day, where's the margin to be amiable and brilliant —or even to be intelligent and decent, when we come home in the evening, though the majority of work-people *are* intelligent and decent?

'I tell you what we want is margin, and we've got to have it!'

Jim did not raise his voice as he finished, but it had a peculiar compelling quality, as if he added to the words he used the whole force of his personality. He confronted you out of his arguments, as the angel confronted the baffled Adam and Eve, with his righteous flaming sword.

Viola's face grew set, and her charming arched brows ceased to look like an inquiring flower. It was horrid of this man to talk as if tiresome and painful things had anything to do with them, when they had invited him to dinner. It was especially unfair to say that Viola didn't see straight, when she went on seeing straight even after it had made her uncomfortable. She didn't know any girls of her own age who danced properly and were half as sorry for the poor.

She looked over Jim's head and asked if he had noticed when he came in if it was still raining?

And then he laughed at her. He deliberately laughed at her, as if she was a naughty but engaging child.

'Come,' he said, 'you mustn't bear me malice for giving you my point of view. You had me here to convert me to yours, didn't you? Well—I'll have to show you first what to convert me from!'

Viola trembled with annoyance. How dared he speak as if he had been lured into a trap? She, who was the cheese in the trap, rebelled more against Jim's audacity in discovering it than she had against the idea of the deception.

Viola wanted some one to step in front of her and take her place, to fight down the rising sense of excitement and alarm this strange man gave her, and to make him look as cheap as she knew he wasn't, and as, for a moment, he had made her feel that she was. And as she looked around her with desperate eyes for an intervention, the door opened and they fell upon her chosen champion.

Reginald Ainley stood there fingering his effective monocle.

Viola gave a little sigh of relief. He was immaculately dressed, as smooth as a peach, and as slender as a walking stick.

She thought for a moment that he had all the virtues and would be the answer to the strange breathlessness at her heart.

Her eyes ran hurriedly from one man to the other, unconsciously measuring them.

Jim was an inch shorter than Ainley, he was more heavily built, there was a mixture of strength in his clumsiness and of clumsiness in his strength. His rough-hewn, unfinished face had no attraction beyond the beauty of his blue, steady eyes, and of those even he was unconscious, for no one had ever pulled him together by appealing to his vanity.

There was no clumsiness at all in Ainley. He was straight-backed and as supple as a racer. He looked like a classical Rodin, and Jim like one of the sculptor's later rough-hewn works, when he wished to arrive at the confusion and grandeur of the soul and left the fine small finish of the animal to look after itself.

'I've had the pleasure,' said Ainley after a quick, appreciative glance at Viola, 'of hearing you speak, Mr. Barton, mingled with the gall of disagreeing with all you had to say—but I'm delighted to meet you for the first time in private life.'

'You've forgotten,' said Jim. 'We've met before, Mr. Ainley. I'm that boy off a barge who was so out of place at Warren Manor.'

Ainley's eyes narrowed; he was more disconcerted than he cared to show.

'Now, that's very odd,' he said pleasantly; 'two fellows from old Bligh's knocking against each other after all these years—

ten, isn't it? I will say this for you, Barton: you're uncommonly changed.'

'No,' said Jim. 'I've had three hundred a year left me, and been to a University, but I'm not changed—nor, from the look of you are you.'

The hostility behind Ainley's smile deepened, and yet it was Jim who looked the least at ease of the two men.

Ainley turned to Viola and told her an amusing anecdote of the Blighs. It was a friendly anecdote and pleasantly included Jim.

Viola did not listen very carefully; she thought it was a pity Mr. Barton hadn't any manners. She wondered if Reggie could have convinced him that he was wrong. She wondered, if Reggie had tried, whether she herself would have been convinced that Mr. Barton was wrong?

He had been horrid, but to be horrid is not necessarily (though Viola would have liked to think it was) to be wrong.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE dinner went off quite as well as any one could have expected. It was rather like playing at bran pie. You put your hand into a disintegrating substance and drew out something you had not expected to find. It might be a thimble or a gollywog, but it was seldom appropriate, and it never seemed to lead at all naturally to anything else.

Jim didn't know any of the people they did, and he talked without ease, solidly, as if talking were an excavating process.

He used his knives and forks correctly, but he didn't know how to use his ideas; they lacked the smooth shallowness of custom. It was as if he only spoke to find something—or—when he meant what he said. Mr. Egerton and Reggie were wonderfully deft and adaptable, but Viola thought it a curiously long and slightly precarious evening. They were always so very near something that might break.

When Viola was alone at last, and Celeste had arranged the reading-lamp carefully by her bed, and noiselessly closed the door, she did not begin to read. She lay with her very small head on a very large expanse of spotless linen pillow, thinking over the evening.

She took up a book beautifully bound for her by Ainley, whose taste in books always went as far as their covers, then she put it down again.

'I should like,' she said to herself, 'to hear him preach. I think he wasn't free to speak to-night. He was like some one who expects to get caught. He ate perfectly properly. I think Reggie must have exaggerated what he was like at the Blighs.' I ought to go and call on Mrs. Bligh some day. He has a funny Cockney voice. I don't see why he doesn't take elocution lessons. I wish father hadn't been so nice to him. Reggie doesn't like him. He was much nicer than father really—it didn't show, his being nice, but he doesn't

like him. I don't myself, really, only he isn't like any one else.

'I'm rather glad mother didn't meet him——' Viola flushed suddenly under the disloyalty of her thoughts. Mrs. Egerton had sent a polite message to her husband just before dinner—she hoped they would all excuse her, but she had too bad a headache to leave her room. Viola knew that Mrs. Egerton hadn't got a headache; she was merely annoying her husband. She knew, though she blamed herself for knowing it, that if Mrs. Egerton had come down she would have been politely devastating to Jim Barton; and that was why she hadn't come down. Mrs. Egerton wished to annoy her husband but she didn't wish to spoil any of his business arrangements. Mr. Egerton did not know this. He was merely very much annoyed; and Harry and Reggie only wondered what was up.

Being a girl and being so dreadfully loved by a person so competent as Mrs. Egerton was sometimes rather terrifying. It made you know what people meant when you didn't like their meanings.

It made your thoughts flicker in and out like frightened mice in the house of an ever menacing cat. One good thing was, Viola hadn't had to have her evening talk with her mother, while her mind was still raw from its contact with Jim. She could insert a little padding first, and she was inserting the padding now.

Her mind ran unceasingly over the evening's events. Her father had been extraordinarily cordial; he had ordered champagne, and Mr. Barton drank nothing but water. It was somehow or other a great pity Mr. Barton drank nothing but water.

Mr. Egerton said, 'Tee-totaller?' and Mr. Barton had replied, 'Yes—but against my principles! I believe in doing all natural and delightful things, but I've given up alcohol as a protest against its abuse.'

'Ah, yes,' Mr. Egerton had said, 'it is the crime of the class you work amongst.'

'It's the only crime they can all get hold of equally easily,' Jim had answered. 'They can't afford the more expensive crimes.'

Her father had dropped the subject, and, still with the

air of overdone consideration, had started up the topic of religion, but Mr. Barton wouldn't be drawn into it. He simply listened. He probably hadn't agreed at all, or else he had an idea that her father wasn't sincere—that would have been horrible; there was no reason why one shouldn't talk pleasantly and tactfully about religion without believing in it.

Then Harry came in late—she must speak to him about it—her father was obviously very angry—that is to say, he'd said, 'Late as usual, Harry,' and raised an eyebrow. Reggie had been more sensible. He had got off religion and taken up swimming and rowing—Mr. Barton had been in a trial eight at Cambridge, but he hadn't had enough time to get his blue. Then they talked about Germany. Mr. Barton hadn't been to Germany—but he admired the Germans; that was a pity. Reggie and the *Morning Post* disliked Germans very much, and felt sure they would have to be fought and beaten. Mr. Barton said we ought to make friends with them, that they were, on the whole—if they weren't too conceited and militant—the best people on the Continent. Reggie agreed they were too conceited, but he didn't agree they were good, and he thought we ought to be a great deal more militant. Poor Mr. Barton was a pacifist—that had to come out. It did suddenly, as if some one had upset a glass of wine by mistake. Harry brought it out. He said, 'But that sounds as if you didn't believe in war,' and Mr. Barton had said very quickly, with quite the most fighting eyes in the world, 'I don't.'

'Never?' the astonished Harry had blurted out. 'Not if a man went for you?'

'Least of all then,' Jim Barton had said. 'Perhaps if he went for somebody else—but there are usually better methods——'

'I'm hanged if I know what they are!' Harry had exclaimed. Then Reggie had intervened, and very nicely, without being a bit prejudiced, laughing all the time, he had shown how little good arbitration and the Hague Conference were or ever would be. He had explained everything so well that her father said it couldn't be better put. Viola herself believed Mr. Barton would be convinced now.

But he wasn't convinced. He said, 'So you think the

brains of men will always be chained to gunpowder? I don't.' But he hadn't gone on with it. Reggie had asked him if he'd read *The Riddle of the Sands.* But Mr. Barton hadn't read it. He said he'd read books in German that were the same kind of thing. He added, 'I don't like inflammatory stuff.'

Viola told him about the Navy League herself—she belonged to it—and she had explained how very necessary it was for England to be prepared, then nothing would happen. But Jim had laughed at her and said, 'When you dress to go out, don't you go out? I think I should if I had a ball dress on!'

Reggie had explained that if you happen to be the richest country in the world it is wiser not to be unarmed in the society of thieves.

'Yes, if you must look on other countries as thieves, and if you will be burdened with riches,' Jim had replied. Unfortunately he was not even an Imperialist.

It was really very puzzling for any one not to be an Imperialist.

Not exactly wicked, of course, but rather like having a principle against eating your own breakfast. It was worse to be a teetotaller and pacifist, because in a kind of way temperance and peace were virtues, and it is such bad form to have virtues that other people don't care much about. Besides teetotallers and pacifists were usually awful creatures and yet Mr. Barton didn't look very awful when he smiled.

Of course she wouldn't see him again unless she went to hear him preach at Poplar. There must be a map of London in the house; she had discovered that Poplar was in London.

The men had been ages over their wine—Viola had known they would be.

Harry was going out to a dance. He had rushed in and asked who that awful bounder was, kissed her and advised her to come with him; when she told him she couldn't he had rushed out. But the others were downstairs for ages, persuading Mr. Barton not to encourage the horrid strike. She wondered how they were doing it. Then they came upstairs and she saw they hadn't persuaded him.

Her father was naturally very much annoyed, and had

asked her to sing something. Reggie was full of jokes, but somehow or other Viola had felt that under the jokes Reggie was even more annoyed than her father.

She sang 'The Rosary,' because every one was singing it.

Her little beautiful voice had slipped its golden sound over all their troubled spirits, and charmed them into peace. When she had finished singing she saw that there were tears in Mr. Barton's eyes. He did not speak at all.

She had gone on singing, but she had felt a curious trembling in her limbs which she had never felt before while she sang, as if all the chords of her being vibrated and were stirred cruelly by the beauty of sound. She couldn't go on very long; though none of them had wanted her to stop.

Mr. Barton went away at once, and her father had letters to write. Reggie had kissed her. Of course he had a perfect right to kiss her.

It was funny that poets thought love so exquisite, when it really seemed rather tiresome—like being trodden on by mistake. Well, of course, Reggie was a dear and she would get used to it. Sometimes even now she liked it, and she always liked Reggie. They were to go and look at some furniture to-morrow. Reggie had said it was just what they wanted, but Viola wondered, because she knew so very well exactly what she liked furniture to be, if it would be what she wanted?

Reggie spoke as if their tastes would naturally be exactly the same. They liked the same dances, the same songs, the same books, the same houses—not always the same people; probably they would like the same furniture. Only it rather mattered, because you had to live with furniture—and people, too, of course mattered. You had to live with people. Being married meant the same people, and even more the same person—always the same person.

Some people were not easy to know. You never had enough of them—they were formidable—exciting—strange. You wanted to find out what they meant. They weren't just tidy and clean and in love with you.

Viola put out the light and snuggled down into the vast expanse of her very soft dark bed. She tried to see Reggie's face—she ought to accustom herself to dream of it, but she

couldn't—his eyeglasses seemed to get in the way, and quite unbidden, startling—almost alarming in their intensity—she saw a pair of very vivid blue eyes looking straight at her—the darkness could not hide them—the enormous security of her engagement was no barrier to them. All that was built up around her for defence and solidity slipped away from her. She was alone in the dark facing those blue eyes—they asked her nothing at all, but they were extraordinarily formidable.

CHAPTER XXVIII

VIOLA awoke in the morning to that sharp contraction of the heart with which instinct defies reason.

She knew that there was nothing wrong; but she didn't want to have to talk to her mother.

It was not the first time she had felt that her intimacy with Mrs. Egerton had penalties attached to it. If a person knows you very well they may cross without warning the threshold of your consciousness. You feel that their mind impinges upon your mind, and that when they withdraw they take away with them something precious and secret which was your own.

The young, with their undefined dreams and insecure possessions, resent these pressures and disclosures. They have no ready weapon against the mastery of searching love. They only know that what they have not yet found for themselves, they do not want found, and perhaps judged, by more expert eyes.

Viola dressed slowly; she wondered if she would be clever enough to avoid talking about that strange man? She had nothing to do with him really, but she found his image waiting for her, without impatience, but with a curious solidity, wherever her imagination turned. It was not like being pursued, but it was like constantly arriving at the same spot.

Viola had read that people who get lost walk round and round in circles continually coming to where they had started from; but then they didn't want to arrive there.

They didn't have that curious little shock of half pleasure and half surprise that Viola had when at any pause in her mind—quite unexpectedly—she saw Jim. She went to her mother's room at her usual time, but her eyes had a veiled look, and she spoke in a tiresome modern tone, a kind of slangy nonchalance which she knew her mother particularly

disliked. Mrs. Egerton made no secret of the fact that jauntiness made her flesh creep, and she knew that Viola was never jaunty unless she had something to hide.

Viola kissed her mother with tenderness and tried to put conviction into her inquiries about the headache. Mrs. Egerton dismissed it with a heroic gesture.

'My poor darling,' she said pityingly. 'Did you have a perfectly wretched evening?'

Viola straightened her slim figure and looked vaguely about her for a chair.

'It wasn't half bad,' she dropped. 'Reggie was quite amusing.' After all it was perfectly natural for her to talk as if it was Reggie who mattered.

'Darling, he's brilliant,' Mrs. Egerton murmured. Her private reflection was that Reggie had probably done something silly, and that she had better find out what it was. 'And that dreadful man,' she said aloud, 'I suppose he turned up? Mr. What's-his name, who belongs to the Salvation Army?'

'Does he?' asked Viola, not meeting her mother's eyes; 'I thought he had a sect of his own. Yes, he turned up all right.'

'Poor dear!' sighed Mrs. Egerton. 'I suppose he wore blue serge and tried to shake hands with Hobbs in the hall. I can't quite see why we should have had the bother of him; but I do hope that, as you and Reggie had to sacrifice your evening together, this eccentric young docker agreed to whatever your father had in mind?'

'I don't think he did agree particularly,' Viola replied. 'He wasn't a very agreeing kind of person.'

'They never are,' said Mrs. Egerton resignedly. 'It's so unfortunate that when the poor become educated they lose all sense of gratitude to the class above them. When I was young, if you asked a person like that to dinner—only, of course, you never did—they would have agreed to anything.'

Viola looked up quickly. She couldn't have said exactly what she felt; part of it was anger, and part of it astonishment at a familiar point of view, which suddenly seemed astonishing; but most of it was downright pain.

She was so much hurt that she instantly fell back upon her safest line of defence; she didn't say anything at all.

'Your father, and Reggie as well, seemed to think it impor-

tant to tone him down a little,' Mrs. Egerton went on after a pause, 'so I hoped you had helped them to succeed. What did you wear, darling?'

'Oh, that nasturtium thing with the lace,' said Viola. 'Can we get anything for you while we are shopping, mother? I am going out with Reggie furniture hunting.'

'Nothing, dearest, thank you; and you sang to them?'

'Yes,' said Viola.

'And afterwards you and Reggie had a nice little talk?'

'We had an hour alone together, I think,' said Viola steadily. 'I looked at the clock.'

'My dearest child,' murmured Mrs. Egerton, 'how modern you are! We poor old lovers never looked at clocks!'

Viola turned suddenly towards her mother, her cheeks turned from their pale clear cream to deep carnation. 'You don't mind my asking you, do you,' she said with terrible young directness. 'But *were* you and father really lovers?'

Mrs. Egerton put down her cup of chocolate very carefully. 'I adored your father,' she said decisively. 'He was like that picture of Sir Galahad, you know the one we have in the hall behind the door? One's not quite sure if he's meant to be dead or not. But, of course, your father didn't wear his hair quite so long.'

'What stopped your adoring him, mother,' Viola went on with a breathless sensation of daring, which she felt might be going to cost her more than it cost her mother.

Mrs. Egerton met her anxious eyes with an ironical indulgence.

'Thirty years, I think, dear' she said gently, 'or perhaps the city. I was very romantic and silly, your father was always thoroughly sensible. We settled down perfectly. *You* are my romance now, Viola. I never gave romance up. I transferred it to you.'

'Oh, but you've had it!' cried Viola. She knew now she was giving herself away, but she couldn't help it—something in her had to come out and find shelter. It was afraid to be alone in her heart. 'What worries me is—I don't feel like that at all about Reggie. There isn't any romance!'

There was a short pause before Mrs. Egerton found the wisest thing to say.

'I think your's,' she said tenderly, 'is all before you, Viola. You are in some ways very immature, and love is coming to you slowly and incompletely—as all great things (which are going to be permanent) come. You do like and trust Reggie?'

'I like him very much indeed,' agreed Viola; 'and of course I trust him.'

'Oh, how lightly you say that, darling,' murmured her mother, 'as if to be able to trust a man was a very little thing! You don't know what it is yet—the immensity of being able to trust your husband! Why, half the women in London can't—and even the other half—— But you are quite safe, for if I had not *known* that Reggie was to be trusted——'

'I should never have liked him, should I?' Viola unexpectedly interrupted.

'No—I don't suppose I ever like any one you have not provided for me to like——'

'My darling girl,' said her mother softly, 'do you suppose I want you to get your disappointments from my hands? If I can stand between you and the first dreadful sharpness of young mistakes, I shall be infinitely thankful.'

But that didn't seem to be what Viola meant. She sat there obstinately saying nothing, as if she wanted her young mistakes.

Mrs. Egerton's skilled mind ran back swiftly over the conversation. Viola was apparently ready to speak about Reggie, but she was unwilling, or was she only bored, when the conversation turned on that unspeakable socialist? Had the blue serge person said anything to upset her? Viola had always been over-sensitive about the poor—her mother quite sympathised with her attitude. It seemed to her, as long as you didn't do anything tiresome, quite the right feeling for a young girl to have.

She had herself suggested to Viola two very excellent societies: one for giving factory girls holidays, and one for providing babies with artificial food.

Whenever Viola felt badly about the poor, she had the societies, and whenever she didn't feel badly, the societies ran on quite comfortably without her. Mrs. Egerton subscribed heavily to both.

It was an excellent arrangement, and it would be just like a socialist to say something to upset it.

It did not enter into Mrs. Egerton's conception of life that the personality of the man himself could have upset Viola. It is doubtful if she thought that people beneath a certain social standing had any personality. They might have good looks, but girls, unless they were fast, did not run any danger from a common man's good looks.

'Dearest,' she said firmly, 'I think you are worried about something. Sometimes I know one feels oppressed with life, and everything seem to stop pleasing. Directly you came in this morning I though to myself that you had something pricking against your happiness. Tell me what it is?'

It was uncanny the power her mother had of slipping past her defences into Viola's mind, but there was a something which had escaped her. Viola herself did not know the importance of this escape.

She only felt faintly relieved that Jim Barton wasn't really in the conversation at all. She had nearly forgotten him herself now in her anxiety about her engagement, but she hadn't forgotten that she didn't want to talk about him.

'I suppose the trouble is,' she said slowly, 'that I don't really know if I'm happy or not. I keep expecting to be happy.'

Her mother's eyes darkened as they met hers.

'Ah, my dear!' she said. 'Thank God you've never known unhappiness!'

'No,' agreed Viola quietly, 'I don't think I have—but what I feel is that I may be going to!'

Mrs. Egerton kissed her, and said with decision, 'Never, if I can help it, darling. There's a cold wind—put on your furs. And don't worry Reggie about your feelings. He'd be desperate about them, and we don't need to be desperate yet, do we?'

Viola returned her kiss, but she wasn't perfectly satisfied. She wasn't quite sure whether she needed to be desperate or not.

As soon as Viola had closed the door Mrs. Egerton rang for the Bradshaw.

'This is a very serious business,' she said to herself, 'and if I'm not very careful something odious is sure to happen.

Reggie hasn't half enough tact, he's too much in love, poor boy; and as for Viola, she deserves to be slapped. She has always had a curious tendency to avoid what is suitable. It makes her very unreliable. I had better take her away from Reggie for a month. Then Paris, then the wedding. Engagements are always unsatisfactory.

'There is a great deal too much emotion about, without one's knowing quite what to do with it. Perhaps I was silly not to let her get used to flirting. But innocence is so rare nowadays, and whatever people say to the contrary, still very attractive to men.

'Unfortunately, Viola always carries things to extremes. At her age, with even less experience, I had as much innocence as was convenient to everybody, and no more. I think we'd better try Eastbourne; it's sufficiently amusing, and sounds healthy enough to make a good excuse.'

Mrs. Egerton's mind was one that never overlooked details.

CHAPTER XXIX

VIOLA thought it the largest wardrobe she had ever seen; the largest, the ugliest, and the most shining.

It hung over all the other furniture as a monstrous Royal Museum hangs over the meaner dwelling places unfortunate enough to surround it. It was not only hideous, it was dwarfing. Viola confronted it with compressed lips and lifted eyebrows. She saw in its bright polished surface the whole of her future. She would always have things like this, in her new life—expensive, shining objects which she wouldn't like.

Reggie stood beside her expectant and gratified.

'This is a really good thing,' he explained, 'I thought it would do for our own room. It costs a hundred guineas, and I think it's worth it.'

'It is indeed, sir,' said the shopman respectfully. 'We consider it one of our finest articles.'

'It was worth a hundred guineas,' Viola said to herself, 'but it wasn't worth anything else. It certainly wasn't worth a thought.

'It's so large,' she objected aloud. 'We should have to let it out in flats, and I should feel so terribly overlooked if I woke up face to face with it in the morning.'

'Well, we've got to have a wardrobe,' said Reggie patiently. He had been patient several times already, because Viola had been persistently unsatisfactory.

She had not taken a proper interest in what he showed her; she asked if they couldn't order things in lumps without looking at them, and when he had made her look at them she had seemed to fade away into something unsubstantial.

She had, earlier in the day, expressed one or two personal preferences for weird things, but Reggie wasn't going to have anything weird in the house.

He knew exactly what he wanted, and Viola obviously didn't—she only knew what she didn't want.

Reggie wished to have his furniture a little better, a little more expensive, and generally a little larger than other people's; but of course the same kind of furniture.

He was quite willing to have beautiful objects if they weren't queer.

'I don't want this wardrobe,' said Viola with unusual finality. 'I don't want it at all!'

She had ceased to see it as a wardrobe. It became instead a polished mirror of the future. In it she saw her mother-in-law, a stout, good-looking woman with just the right jewels, hair, and finger-nails a little too conscious of them, and of her religion, which didn't interfere with them, but was extremely high. She had been brought up a Nonconformist in a small provincial town, but it was quite wonderful how she had got on in London.

All Viola's new sisters-in-law appeared in its polished surface, successfully married to city men, and one even more successfully to a Lord. Viola saw their fine pink children, their firm, fixed ideas. You always knew just what they thought of the Government, food, education and religion, and just what kind of places they would go to in the summer.

If it wasn't Buxton it would be Harrogate; and if it wasn't Harrogate it was Eastbourne, but it was always a place full of ozone and expensive hotels, where every one had the same ideas.

In the end, Viola thought, they would have the same tombstones, but they would have the same ideas until the tombstones came, fastened inflexibly over them, like these wide marble slabs which made the bare idea of resurrection incredible. It was a mistake to suppose the last trump would rouse Reggie's relations, unless it was blown by a butler and they thought it was the dinner bell.

She turned away from the dreadful picture of her enveloped future to her young, handsome lover, but in his eyes she divined the same spirit; he had been pouring it into her all day on the torrent of his affections. She couldn't quite have said what the spirit was, but it seemed to stand for the pressure of all the material world. Viola had always, from time to time, secretly rebelled against the material world, but she had never felt a rebellion as sharp as this.

'It is guaranteed to keep its polish, madam,' the shopman remarked persuasively.

'Oh, yes, I know, I know,' said Viola a little wildly. 'But it hasn't any shape; or if it has, it's like a mausoleum without windows.'

'Oh, come, Viola,' Reggie objected, 'it is exactly the same shape as any other wardrobe.'

'I won't have it in my room,' said Viola desperately, with the finality of breaking glass.

The shopman turned discretely away, and Reggie met Viola's eyes with astonished hostility. He grasped in a flash that they were in the middle of a crisis, one of those unexpected, important battlefields of love and sex in which somebody was going to get their own way at the expense of somebody else.

Reggie was an experienced hand in a crisis; he never gave way, and he never spluttered. No one could manage a nervous horse or an angry workman better.

All ignorant and weak creatures who based their opposition to Reggie on the intensity of their emotion, found him easily their master.

But Reggie needed to have a good deal of power behind him, and he was conscious that Viola's small, pale face, set against him, robbed him of half his force. He felt all the agonised ferocity of unshared passion, and it made him want to shake Viola or to shout at her.

She stood there so maddeningly aloof, so lovely, so inciting, and such an obstacle to what she incited. But Reggie quickly controlled every feeling in him except that of his habitual mastery; it would never do to let her see she could get her own way by showing temper.

'My dear child,' he said quietly, 'you want your tea. I think we'd much better take this wardrobe.' He turned to the shopman. 'You may put this down on our list,' he said with admirable coolness.

He knew Viola wouldn't make a scene before the shopman, and she didn't. She didn't even turn away from the wardrobe. For quite a perceptible moment she went on looking at it. But when Reggie said, 'Come along old girl, and have some tea,' she acted with curious decision.

'I am going home now,' Viola said quietly. 'I don't want

any tea.' But as Reggie prepared to follow her into the motor she put up a small, detaining hand and said to the footman, 'John, you need not hold the door open, Mr. Ainley is not coming back with me.'

Reggie lifted his alert eyebrows and wondered if this was a moment for a further lesson in mastery. But there was none of the weakness of provocation in the eyes which met his unflinchingly.

'I am dismissed, then?' he asked in a low voice. But I shall see you to-morrow—you are going to Clare's?'

Viola's slight inclination of the head might have been taken for consent, or it might equally have been a sign to John to shut the door and return to his seat. She gave no other sign before the motor slipped off into Piccadilly.

It was an unsatisfactory stage in a quarrel for a parting, and Reggie was hardly sure whether to consider it finished or not. Viola had not smiled, but on the other hand Reggie had the wardrobe down on the list.

Mrs. Egerton met Viola in the hall.

'You were so late, dear,' she explained, 'that I gave you up for tea and came home, and now you look exhausted. You've not forgotten that we all go to Clare's tomorrow. She's the new sister who has the pink pearls, isn't she?'

Viola's eyes met her mother's with precisely the same fixed opposition Reggie had decided to override. 'I am not going to Clare's to-morrow,' she said in a low voice. 'I want to stay quietly at home.'

Mrs. Egerton's lovely wondering eyes wavered for a moment, but they showed no desire for mastery. On the contrary, they revealed nothing but an access of maternal tenderness.

'You're tired, dearest,' she murmured.

'I want to be alone,' said Viola, speaking as dispassionately as a girl on the verge of tears could manage to speak.

'I think you are very wise,' said her mother soothingly. 'Shopping is terribly exhausting, and a quiet Sunday all by yourself is just what you need. Of course Reggie will be broken-hearted, and Clare very disappointed. It is never a good thing to disappoint one's new relations-in-law. But no doubt you've had it all out with Reggie already?'

'No,' Viola admitted, 'I don't want to have it out. He'd make a fuss. I don't want to argue about it. I want to be left alone.'

'But of course,' agreed her mother, 'nothing could be more simple and natural. Go and lie down, darling. I will explain to Reggie.'

Mrs. Egerton's explanations were not those which Viola would herself have given, but they made everything seem more simple and natural; everything—except a curious, hard, new sensation in Viola's own heart. Something very tender and sensitive in Viola had hardened, as all sensitive things harden when they are handled by force.

It was curiously thrilling to find herself alone for Sunday. Viola could not remember that she had ever been really alone before. Harry had rushed in at the last moment with a hurried explanation and an indulgent pat. He had been supposed to be spending the Sunday in town, but he hadn't really meant to, and his explanation was more perfunctory than his pat. It left Viola wonderfully free.

She wandered about the house after a silent, lonely breakfast, asking herself what she was going to do with her splendid, empty hours? She certainly wasn't going to see any of her friends, that would spoil it all and drag her back into the circle of wardrobes. She thought she would like to do something quite different, only when she sat down with the *Observer* and a sealyham puppy she couldn't quite think what different things there were to do. She felt she was being influenced by the house, the distant servants, who would expect her to go to church, and even the sealyham puppy, whose only idea was the hackneyed one of a Sunday walk in the Park.

It was with a strange dart of relief that Viola remembered Poplar. Why not go to Poplar and hear Jim Barton preach?

She couldn't take the motor because it was Sunday, but there must be some other way of getting to Poplar, though it was strangely difficult when you had a motor to envisage any other methods of getting about. She would like to hear that odd man again, who seemed to think that none of the things mattered which Viola had been brought up to believe were the only things that mattered.

If it were really true they didn't matter, he ought to be able to suggest substitutes.

Viola rang the bell and asked John how you got to Poplar.

John most conveniently had an aunt who lived in Poplar, so that he could suggest without hesitation the tube, and then a tram; you took the tram from a mysterious place called the 'Lyre,' which turned out, with apologies from John for mentioning it, to be the name of a public-house; and when Viola said, 'But, John, couldn't I take a taxi from the Lyre, or whatever it is called?' John coughed as if he were amused, and said, 'Well, of course, you could, if you 'appened to see one passing.'

Viola realised, after she had braved the fairly simple problem of the tube and found herself outside the unaccountable Lyre, that taxis do not pass in Poplar, unless they are moving rapidly away from it.

It was a different world—a large, full world, with a big, broad road to move about on, driven into by a network of small and knife-like cuttings, brimming over with unexpectedly dishevelled life. All its inhabitants were completely unlike Viola. She felt herself hemmed in and surrounded by fried fish and feathers, by loud, unusual voices, and a certain openness of casual mirth. These people had their rules, their emotions, and even their privacies, but they were jostled and infinitely less private than the people Viola knew. They might have been a different race, and not merely the same race under different conditions.

But if they were casual they were kind. They stared at Viola a good deal, but they told her where she wanted to go, and when she mentioned Jim Barton's name it acted like a talisman.

'Oh, well, if you'd said Jim Barton,' they explained, 'you'd 'ave got there long ago.'

Calvary Church was only Mrs. Hodgkins' fancy, Jim Barton was the property of Poplar.

Viola soon found herself before a large, dirty building, through the doors of which people passed slowly and persistently, like water passing through the neck of a bottle. Calvary was always full, and Viola found herself pushed resistlessly into it, and fixed solidly behind a column.

Very bad jingly music was being played on an organ. There was an altar and two candles, but Calvary had not been built for a church and looked a little lopsided. Somebody pushed a book into her hand, and the music having wandered about in an agreeable waltz, pulled itself together into a triumphant march.

The choir surged in, singing with exultation, but not by themselves; the whole congregation opened its mouth and flung all its lung power into the tune. It was not music, but it could have been suitably described as a 'joyful noise before the Lord.'

Mrs. Hodgkins looked very well in her mortar-board and spotless surplice, and her husband marched beside her, as one who had been blessed beyond his deserts and is a trifle obscured by the process.

A little way behind them walked Jim. His cassock and his surplice had done very little to modify his appearance, his eyes were fixed on his hymn-book, his chin jutted out a little, and his hair was not as smooth as Mrs. Hodgkins's, thought it ought to have been.

Viola felt strangely disillusioned and upset at the sight of Jim. How could she have supposed that this man could help her? He was just an ordinary, common man, and all her problems stared inflexibly at her, beyond all powers of his to solve them.

Viola disliked church services. Their reiteration bored her, and like most fairly regular attendants at church, she had ceased to remember what the words meant.

The Church of Cavalry sang its hearty, jagged way through its chosen hymns and psalms as if it were breaking stones.

Mrs. Hodgkins read in an admirable monotone one of the nicer stories about King David. There was some more precarious singing, and then Jim put down his hymn book and prayed, silently at first, and with his untidy head buried in his hands.

Jim loved the rough, loud music; it helped to shut him away into the silence of prayer.

He could feel the Power he knew and believed was God behind the wall of sound, speaking to him—wordless, won-

derful things which could not be uttered, but which took away all fear of man.

You can't have more than one great overmastering fear at a time, and Jim Barton feared God utterly. This morning he was in great need of Him, because his heart was shaken by another image. An image that was useless to his work and his life, and yet would not leave his imagination alone.

He had thought about Viola ever since he had seen her—that little slender, butterfly creature with questioning eyes had lit his heart from end to end with the precipitancy of lightning.

He prayed silently till the music stopped to be delivered from barren longing, and then he lifted up his eyes, and across the church he met Viola's bent on him wonderingly, consideringly, as if his service of God was a strange thing. Her presence was so astounding that for a moment Jim thought it was not real, and then he shut out the actual image of her again, and plunged back into the reality of his prayer. He dared not pray any more to have the temptation removed from him; he only prayed that he might be used in her service, since she was brought for him to serve.

Then he spoke aloud, but still as if he were alone with God. There was a complete silence in the building; Jim's words had the power of structural things and could not be allowed to pass as fugitive sounds pass.

Viola felt the extraordinary tensity of the silence, but she could not forget that Jim's voice was blatantly cockney.

He got up and walked to the pulpit with a singular absence of self-consciousness, as if he were simply in a hurry to get there. But when he was there he stood silent for a long minute and looked at his congregation.

Viola had, after all, not underestimated those deep, compelling eyes. Jim gave out no text. He spoke as if he wasn't in a pulpit at all. He meant every word he said. A great deal of it was very funny, in a wry, ironic manner, fun wrung out of Jim's sense of the oddness, the futility, the inconceivable disconcertingness of life, and some of it was very fierce, with a sharp scorn of comfort and selfishness. He stripped the soul bare and let the winds of Heaven play on it; and the winds of Heaven play very rough games with a bare soul.

No one in Calvary Church ever felt comfortable for very long except Mrs. Hodgkins. She knew that Jim was speaking about other people, and she agreed with every word he said, except when he was a little coarse.

Viola didn't agree with him. She felt raw and indignant. She wanted to argue and answer back. She hated to be put in the wrong, and, after all, that was where she was put—she was putting herself there, for all her indignation, with every word Jim spoke.

Jim didn't see her any more, he didn't see anybody. He was lost, as all great orators lose themselves, in his subject. He was trying to find out what God loved, and being at least fairly certain what He hated.

But every soul to whom he spoke could have recognised themselves in what Jim said, because every human soul is like every other human soul when it is naked. Jim punished himself unmercifully, because he lived among naked things and knew no safer method of punishment. All his sins thrust at him like swords.

Viola felt that Jim demanded too much of human nature. He appeared to believe you can really love your neighbour as yourself, and give up without any flourish of a conscious sacrifice, not things—that luxury of giving—but the will behind the things, which it is the passion of all human creatures to keep inviolate.

Jim seemed to think that egoism shut out God, and that quite lovely, usual things were egoism. And he asserted that you ought to find out what you really did believe and then act on it, though all the walls of Jericho fell at the sound of the trumpet, and yet how could you really do this and yet be pleasant and beloved by the people who inhabit Jericho? Jim didn't explain what happened after the walls of Jericho finished falling.

He just stopped suddenly, almost at once, it seemed to Viola, and yet he had been speaking nearly an hour. The suddenness of his break with her thoughts hurt and astounded her.

Why hadn't he gone on? What right had he to stop so soon and shut the door between her soul and his?

Jim left the pulpit and buried his head again in his hands—his heart was shaking against his side. Had he harmed

her? Had he helped her? Had he left for one moment the side of his Master to reach her, and so failed utterly in his loyalty to both? He dared not look at Viola again. It was a priest she had come to see and not a man, and Jim felt himself so very little a priest and so terribly much a man.

CHAPTER XXX

THEY all sat round the table looking at him. They were his disciples and the friends of his heart, and yet as Jim met their ardent, excited glances, he was aware that he had never been so much alone. They were excited by the success of Calvary, by Jim's enormous congregations, and his passing celebrity. They didn't like what he meant, because, half the time they didn't know what he meant, and when they did, it struck sharp against the fruits of his success. They couldn't be quite unselfish about it; his success was theirs, they mounted on the wings of his flight. They hadn't been anything at all before Jim came to Poplar, not even good. Now they had the Kingdom of Heaven, and a much better position on earth. Naturally, they wanted to keep it.

It was a small committee: Mr. and Mrs. Hodgkins, Mr. Belk, the churchwarden, Mr. Amble and Mr. Cadge, the two chief sidesmen. Mr. Belk was a grocer by profession—all the week long sugar and sand, butter and margarine, the grind of big wholesale firms and the petty pilfering of subordinates kept his shrewd mind on the stretch. He had done very well for himself in spite of everything, and he took to religion on Sunday as weaker vessels take to theatres and dances—it exercised the muscles of his soul. Behind his hard, commercial surface lay a very kind heart, and in the end Jim always touched it.

Mr. Cadge had a violent faith. Religion excited him uncontrollably, like alcohol. His pugnacity revelled in fighting sin; he pounced on backsliding with the eager zest of a butterfly collector who succeeds in netting a rare and splendid specimen. It must be owned that the scoring off of badness meant more to Mr. Cadge than the cultivation of virtue. He was a carpenter by profession, and a malignant Christian.

Mr. Amble, the other sidesman, wasn't at all practical. He didn't care for life very much. What he had had of it had

not been very nice. He took his capacity for pleasure out in visions. The new Jerusalem supplemented Poplar. Mr. Amble's wife and three children had died early and very horribly of diphtheria after a wild six years' trying to make Mr. Amble's loose ends meet; and Mr. Amble had gone on ever since with his ends looser than ever and his sense of pilgrimage more acute.

He had fallen from being a schoolmaster in a world of indeterminate gentility into being a sandwich man in a world of no gentility at all. Then he had met Jim, and been dragged back up the thorny, uneven path of reformation, into being a schoolmaster again.

He did not really want alcohol when he was sure of Heaven.

There were two subjects down for the committee to discuss—free seats, and the dismissal of Mr. Herbert Moggridge. Mr. Belk knew that they had done very well financially already, but he wanted paid seats to ensure a regular income; besides a man who has a seat of his own looks like something.

He knew he couldn't use the latter point in a discussion with Jim, and he was a little uneasy lest Jim should put his finger on it, whether he used it or not.

Mr. Cadge wanted paid seats because he thought there should be short, sharp lines drawn between goats and sheep. Goats might come to church, but they should be made to pay for it or go without seats.

Mrs. Hodgkins wished for paid seats because it was her own idea, and wouldn't be at all likely to be Jim's.

Mr. Amble had never given the matter a thought, and Mr. Hodgkins fixed agonised eyes upon Jim in the hope that he would be strong enough to get his own way (he knew Jim's way would be free seats) without calling on him for support.

Mrs. Hodgkins summed up the prevalent feeling. 'I am sure,' she said, after listening meekly to the male opinion which she had first provoked and then guided, 'that what we pay for we value. It is the sacrifice we put into it, not, of course, the money that counts. I feel it would be blessed to the congregation. They come in large numbers very regularly. Their spiritual home is here; no doubt—just as in a real home—they would appreciate a spot they could call their own. I know that Calvary sets out to be freer than other

religious institutions, but I think if it were put to the congregation themselves they would choose to pay for their places, partly in recognition of what we try to do for them here, and partly as I have tried to explain, because they would value their own place in the House of God.'

'That's the theory of the favourite arm-chair, isn't it?' Jim replied bluntly. 'I'm afraid of people having seats of their own. I'd like a church to be a place where nobody had anything of their own—not even his prayers.'

'That's loose,' said Mr. Cadge emphatically; 'I call that very loose, Mr. Barton. Cain had a mark on his forehead, hadn't he? You may be sure it wasn't there for nothing!'

'Well, I dare say it was all right for Cain,' said Jim, 'but I notice Abel didn't, and I suppose we'd all rather consider ourselves on the line of Abel.'

'The way I look at it,' said Mr. Belk, 'is, a little goes a long way—with regular payments we know where we are—offertories vary—it's the difference, to put it to a vulgar way, between cash payments and running up an account. St. Paul's Cathedral is all right free, but that's a large firm—relatively speaking, we are a small one.'

'I call that godless,' said Mr. Cadge heatedly, 'mint and cummin, that's what I call that argument. Who wants to be like St. Paul's? But what I say, is I have never been in a cinema or a low haunt in my life, and why shouldn't I spend my money on a private seat in our own place of worship if I want to? Is all our pockets to go into sinks of iniquity, and the Church of God to be sent empty away?'

'That's the look out of your own conscience, Cadge,' Jim said good-humouredly. 'I'm not going to stop your giving—you can give till you burst—all I want to see is that giving is voluntary, not compulsory, and that we don't follow the Apostles' handsome precedent and ask for seats on the right hand and the left, when we ought to be thankful to get into the building at all.'

'I like to see people wandering in and out,' Mr. Amble murmured vaguely.

Mr. Belk laid a fat and confidential finger on Jim's arm. 'The point I should like to make, Mr. Barton,' he said, 'is let people of all sorts have seats, and set aside certain seats

for payment. That will surely suit all parties. No one need feel shut out, and yet we could depend, say, on church expenses regular.'

Jim grinned at him.

'Belk,' he said, 'you have no more principle than a magnate. It sounds all right, but it isn't. This building wasn't given for people who could pay for it, but for people who wanted it. They pay, too, most of 'em, all they can afford. I'm with that; whatever's worth having is worth paying for. Put it to the congregational vote if you like, but I'll tell them what I think of it first.'

'It won't be any good if you do that,' said Mr. Belk disconsolately. 'You always turn them.'

Mrs. Hodgkins did not sniff. She lifted her eyes to Heaven and prayed inaudibly for grace. Jim saw that she was engaged in this provocative practice, but though he was prepared to let Mrs. Hodgkins force him along any line that merely involved externals, he wasn't prepared to submit to any force but his own in matters which led beyond. Still, he always wanted to please her.

'They've got to know what they are doing,' he explained with an appealing glance at Mrs. Hodgkins' raised eyes and fervently moving lips. 'I can't twist facts, Mrs. Hodgkins, but I'm pretty sure you've stated your case already, and it's only fair that I should state mine.'

Mrs. Hodgkins' eyes came down and met Jim's serenely. Grace had been given to her. She had canvassed the entire district to get her views accepted, but she saw what a vast difference there was between her perfectly straightforward persuasions and Jim's unscrupulous appeals.

'Of course,' she said gently, 'if you prefer to appeal to the emotions, I have no more to say.'

Jim hung his head; he always felt very miserable when people weren't fair, especially very good people, as if he couldn't have been very fair himself, or it wouldn't have happened.

'Shall we all think it over a bit?' he asked apologetically, 'and perhaps some of us may see differently next week.'

To every one's surprise Mr. Cadge leaned forward and exclaimed impressively. 'I see differently now. It is a temptation of the devil—Jesus Christ spent all He had feeding

the multitude; that's why 'e 'ad the miracle in 'and. None of the four thousand paid for their seats. Mr. Barton, I've made a mistake. Say no more. You were right and I was wrong. You have my vote.'

Jim's eyes rose and fixed themselves on his favourite disciple. Mr. Hodgkins looked piteously from Jim to his wife. She was praying again—her cheeks were flushed. Mr. Cadge had inadvertently coupled her name with the devil. Her husband did worse. His was the casting vote. He said in a trembling voice, 'There seems to be much to be said for free seats. I understand, in a sense, of course, there isn't, but on the whole—well, on the whole, I think perhaps there is.'

Mr. Belk capitulated good-naturedly. He privately intended to bring the matter up again in a more attractive form. 'A thing can be fig syrup without being called fig syrup,' he thought contentedly. 'Let us adjourn the question,' he said aloud soothingly. 'That's what I suggest. And now, friends, there's the painful subject of Mr. 'Erbert Moggridge; 'e comes next on the agenda.'

Mr. Cadge's eyes lit up with joy.

'Now,' he said, with a sigh of relief, 'we can get to business. Barton, we've got to look facts in the face. This time we are dealing with open sin. It's a perfectly straight question; are we, or are we not, to have as an organist a man who is a drunkard and a thief?'

Jim's eyes went down on the table. He didn't see the plain dark cloth with an ink stain his impatient hand had caused; he saw, instead, the face of Mr. Herbert Moggridge. It was not an attractive face—furtive, narrow like a weasel's, with watery blue eyes, and a perpetual tremor of the lower lip. Mr. Moggridge was not even a clever thief. He had been easily caught fumbling in an overcoat pocket at the working men's club.

'He hasn't broken down at the organ,' said Jim miserably.

'Let's stick to the point,' said Mr. Cadge furiously. 'Hasn't he broken down everywhere else? Is there a Saturday night he hasn't been seen in a disgraceful condition on the 'Igh? Answer me that, Mr. Barton, *and* the eighth commandment? Are we to have real religion here in this 'Ouse of God, or are we to 'ave it a nest of permitted vagabonds and criminals?'

It was a splendid climax; the small, heated room shook with it; the placid face of Mr. Belk responded to it. He was not a persecutor, but he was a profiteer. He had all that dislike of thieves which people feel for their poorer relatives.

Mrs. Hodgkins looked remote, but she didn't feel remote; she meant to cut in when she saw a good opportunity for scoring.

Mr. Hodgkins moved uneasily in his seat; beads of perspiration stood out on his brow. He wanted Mr. Moggridge saved, but he wanted him saved without his help. He had flown in the face of Providence once already about free seats, but he couldn't do it twice—his wings would not bear him, and there was no angel to keep his feet from being dashed against the stones. Jim's eyes turned to meet his; they rested upon him kindly, but he waited, to give his friend time to come to the rescue; then he looked away again as if he knew that rescue wasn't there.

Mr. Amble spoke suddenly with more vivacity than usual. 'It's the only thing he's got,' he said, 'the organ. I notice—I dare say I'm wrong—but I do notice that if you take away from a man the only thing he's got, he gets worse.

'I knew a man once who only had a canary. I don't say the canary helped to keep him straight. I don't think he kept very straight. But when the canary died he went to pieces. It was a case of what you might call *in extremis*. Of course he was a very poor specimen indeed, I know that—a very poor specimen——' Mr. Amble's voice faded reminiscently away.

Jim smiled at him. He loved the shrewdness of Mr. Belk, the pugnacity of Mr. Cadge, and the unending ordered kindness of Mrs. Hodgkins, but he loved Mr. Hodgkins and Mr. Amble for themselves; they usually failed him, and they were invariably ineffectual in carrying out their duties, but their spirits never went astray, the meaning behind their blunders was more magnificent than success.

Jim had given Albert Hodgkins time—he looked again at him now still smiling. Mr. Hodgkins cleared his throat.

'In a sense,' he said in a feeble, fluttering voice, 'I see what Mr. Amble means, perhaps severe talking to, a suspension even, and then one more chance.' He spoke pleadingly with

his eyes on his wife's face. She had not spoken, but she looked at him; her look literally took him down, picked him up and laid him in a drawer. The drawer shut on him with a kind of snap. No more came from him.

'I gave him a talking, too,' said Jim reluctantly. 'He won't do much better, of course, but I don't think he'll do much worse. What I should suggest doing is to raise his stipend a little. We only pay him £10 a year. I should think another £10 might keep him out of mischief. I don't think the habit of theft is very deep-seated.'

'What about *gin?*' demanded Mr. Cadge, trembling with resentment. 'Ten pounds a year more on gin, because a man's a thief! What price respectability at Calvary?'

Mr. Belk frowned and blinked; the use of the word Calvary was unfortunate. He saw that Jim was off on an inner trail of his own, and he suspected him of laughter. Cadge was a poor teamster, he pulled too hard.

'If I might ask,' Mr. Belk observed soothingly, 'just as a guide to our feelings, Mr. Barton, what passed between you and Mr. Moggridge on the subject?'

Jim paused. He remembered exactly what he had said to the tearful, cowering little man, dragged red-handed into his study; but it didn't sound suitable for repetition. He had said 'You're a bad old lot, aren't you, Moggridge?' and then he had put him into his arm-chair and given him a hot drink, and when Mr. Moggridge had stopped shivering and crying, and looking about wild-eyed, for imaginary policemen, Jim had said, 'I'd go slow for a bit, you know, Moggridge. I would really. Gin'll rot your liver, and other people's pockets will land you in jail. It isn't worth it, you know—it isn't really. If you're short of tobacco you can always come in here and stop up your pipe with mine.' And then they'd talked about Palestrina masses and the music of the fifteenth century. Jim didn't know one note of music from another, and he hadn't the vaguest idea, even after Mr. Moggridge had finished talking, whether Palestrina was an epoch, a river, or a man, but he saw that just to talk about music put a little honour and grip back into Mr. Moggridge, and Mr. Moggridge had so little honour that it was just as well to restore promptly to him what he had mislaid.

Jim leaned forward and spoke with a flash of emotion.

'The truth is,' he said, 'he'll never be any better. He's gin-sodden and his will is like a damp match; but he could very easily get worse. Now, I shouldn't like to be responsible for making old Moggridge worse; would you?'

'Isn't it a question of principle?' asked Mrs. Hodgkins coldly; 'what about our duty to the church and its music?'

'He's no choir-master,' agreed Mr. Belk.

'Still, we have Higgins to train the choir,' Jim pleaded 'Higgins is as efficient as a buzz saw. Moggridge does get something out of the organ nobody else we've got can do, and the organ keeps him from all the gin he'd soak up if he hadn't got it. You see, the way I look at it is this: if you've only got gin and an organ, and people take away the organ, well, then, you've only got gin.'

'It's putting a premium on vice,' said Mr. Cadge defiantly. 'What we want is a man at the organ we can point to and say, "That's one of our Calvary men," not "Please look the other way—rolling down the 'Igh comes the organist of—of——" ' Mr. Cadge pulled himself up short just in time to avoid an involuntary plunge into rhyme.

'Come,' said Jim, 'it's nearly church time, and nobody has said old Moggridge is a bad musician. Think of all the awful characters Jesus Christ went about with in the gospels. Some of them would look a bit shocking even in Poplar, but I wouldn't like to think we shut any of them out of the place that was meant for them, would you? There's plenty of room for the ninety-and-nine just persons in the West End, isn't there? What do you all think about that extra ten pounds? You couldn't make Moggridge any worse by it, could you? Let's see if we can't make him any better.'

A slow, shrewd smile crept over Mr. Belk's face. 'I vote,' he said, 'we raise Moggridge's screw ten pounds—or else Mr. Barton's—for I am of the opinion if we don't agree to do it, he'll do it out of his own pocket.'

The meeting ended in laughter. They all melted personally to Jim before they left him, though Mr. Cadge and Mrs. Hodgkins kept their principles intact.

Jim stood quite still for a moment after they'd gone, then he went into a small inner room and put on his cassock. Jim

didn't like his cassock, and he was a little afraid of tearing it; but he put it on carefully and brushed his rebellious lock of hair down flat.

Then he kneeled down and prayed; he prayed that he might not grow tyrannical, because it is so difficult not to be tyrannical when you see things very plainly, and very differently from those around you.

The sense of loneliness depend upon him. It wasn't fair to count on Hodgkins, it would only get him into trouble with his wife; and Amble could never be trusted to remember anything outside his dreams.

God was very far away. There was the church and the settlement built for His service—men's and boys' clubs—mothers' meetings—girls' classes—even a dining-hall and lounge for working people, all used and loved as they had been in Jim's old eager dreams. He had realised his dreams now; only the quality in them which transcended fact had gone.

Could one's heart be too full of other people's business? Where beneath all the lively, earnest bustle of his days was the fount of the Eternal? Only a week ago he would have known, humbly but triumphantly, that the strength of it was in himself. He loved his work then, it seemed vast with possibilities. Now suddenly as if the sun shining at its zenith, on a lovely land, went out and left it blind—he felt nothing. His work looked useless in his hands, his heart was out of it.

Jim had never known what exhaustion meant. His magnificent physical strength had kept him from depression. Nothing slackened in him from use; body, mind, and will moved easily and as punctually as the ordered stars.

But something had gone out of him now. He buried his head deeper in his hands, he cried over and over again that prayer which comforts the soul at its lowest moments of vitality—'Lord, I believe—help Thou my unbelief, increase my faith!'

His watch ticked warningly on, but he held his mind away from time, fixed in silence.

It was nearly the hour for his service, and he would have to give, even out of his empty heart, if he received nothing.

But was it empty? What was there instead of his church needs and daily interests, sharp in him, as if against his bared heart he could feel the nails?

He knew only too well what face it was; it never left him and he could not look away from it. Jim did not struggle against Viola's image with the sterile agony of the ascetic; he believed that not even his useless love of her was wrong. But he tried always to go deeper to find for her as well as for himself, an outlet into the love of God.

He wanted to keep love and be free, but no man, however strong, has ever done this suddenly or once for all. The union of love and freedom must always be a lifelong gradual task.

Jim had no memories to degrade her image or to set the love of Viola apart from God. He knew that he was safe if he could keep them together, but he had never valued his personal safety. What he wanted was to be sure that Viola was safe—safe from life, from the corroding selfishness of luxury, from the panic of idealism confronted by facts; and he knew that he could not keep her safe, for all his prayers.

He prayed persistently that this virtue which had gone out of him might go to her, and give her courage. He prayed that she might have all his ardour—let him be dry, as dry as a dead leaf and as powerless—let him find no consolation and no comradeship in his work—let him go halting, all his days like Jacob after he had wrestled with the angel—but let her be strong, companioned, whole! Jim could pray more freely now; he could feel his heart beat and the tears rise. If only this little, slender, lovely being who had hurt him with her beauty, might be safe.

It was time for him to go into his church. He wouldn't be quite empty-handed for his people after all, because he had lost something. He was tried as they were, despondent as they were. He could go to them with a quickened understanding, because for the first time in all his ministry he did not want to go to them.

CHAPTER XXXI

VIOLA submitted to Eastbourne. It wouldn't make very much difference where Mrs. Egerton took her.

There would be fewer people than she knew in London, but they would be the same kind of people, and they would be invited to the same kind of meals; but if she went out and looked for it she would find the sea.

The feeling of panic she had begun to have in London left her. New clothes and wedding presents stopped pouring in; they had reminded her that she was being led in a procession of flowers and garlands up to a perfectly cold stone, where she would feel a knife at her throat.

Viola knew vaguely what she was doing when she accepted Reggie; what she hadn't known was whom she was doing it for.

She had thought Reggie was a devout and insignificant lover, who would make life freer and easier; and he was changing every day into a man with rights, who meant to have his own way and intended Viola to be part of it.

He was more in love with her than ever, but he was more important, and she hadn't thought Reggie would be important. Curiously enough her own importance dwindled with her engagement. She had known girls who became transformed by happy love into beings filled with power and beauty. Their shyness had left them. They knew suddenly how to handle social situations. They seemed to feel the riddle of the universe take them on as interested accomplices. But Viola felt as if her personality was being blotted out; something free and alert in her was conscious of being abruptly checked. She felt as if to give her life to Reggie meant simply to stifle it and to live wholly outside the circle of her own desires.

She hadn't been sure before what her own desires were, but she was sure now. She was sure they weren't like Reggie's.

Mrs. Egerton had cut Viola's life to fit her, but she had done so with enormous skill and with no pitched battles, and

Viola was about to give herself into hands that had already shown themselves to be harder and less skilful than her mother's.

Viola didn't want to be Reggie's, and she didn't want to make Reggie hate her. She wanted passionately to be her own self, and still to be approved.

But there wasn't a single person in Viola's world who wouldn't disapprove of her for breaking her engagement.

It would be so unaccountable, and in Viola's world if you couldn't account for things you were reproached for them. Viola deliberately shut out the image of her mother. She dared not think what meals and after life would be, face to face with Mrs. Egerton, if she deliberately crossed her will.

She felt conscious of her mother's will at every turn, when they were laughing over the morning paper, or strolling on the green, listening to light comedies, or watching people play lawn tennis; Mrs. Egerton was always at Viola's disposal for jokes, and memories and plans, and always making Viola feel as if there were no other plans, no other jokes, no other memories.

There wasn't any way out when Viola thought of her mother.

She told herself sharply that she was very wicked. Why should she want a way out when it would mean upsetting every one she knew and cutting Reggie to the very heart?

She had much better put up with a situation she had made for herself, and where she would be, if she kept quiet and reasonable, the only sufferer.

One morning she went by herself for a walk on Beachy Head. It was too windy for her mother, and she left Cèleste in the town shopping. She would be late for lunch, but she didn't care. The salt, bright air set something reckless free in her. She climbed up the short-grassed height as if she were taking the hill by storm.

There was a strong wind blowing, and seagulls dipped to and fro in it. The sea below was colourless with white-snatched edges. Viola could not go very close to the cliff's edge, the rushing air bullied and discouraged her; but she loved the taste and feel of it on her lips and against her beaten cheeks. For a little while she saw no one at all—

the world was empty of everything, but the free life of the wind.

What was the use of shutting herself down into a life like a padded velvet box? Wasn't half her desire to spare pain and be unselfish—fear? She wasn't afraid up here, on the height of the world where there was no room for the small subterfuges of security. Pain for pain if she submitted now and without love—what kind of gift was she giving, and how long would it spare Reggie suffering? Was it really Reggie that she was trying to spare?

Motives are a puzzling hunt at best, with crossed scents and a poor chance of finding. But Viola told herself she could at least look facts in the face. Jim Barton had said she didn't see things straight. Of course he was wrong, but he had put her on her mettle.

No one in her world would agree with her, and this man with his opposite standards and his hard bitten look of reality—would he agree with her?

Perhaps he would say no; the only thing that mattered was sticking to a given word—like monks were supposed to; but even that would be a comfort. If Viola felt she had to marry Reggie, it wouldn't be as dull or as petty as to marry him because she was afraid to say, and stick to it, 'I don't like you enough.'

But in order to get his opinion Viola would have to see this curious person first.

It was odd how elated and expectant seagulls and high winds make you feel on the top of a cliff. For a little while it seemed to Viola as if everything in life was perfectly plain and gay. Then she went back to the hotel; she was very late for lunch. Mrs. Egerton had waited for Viola. She made no complaint, but when she said, 'Of course, I waited for you, dearest,' the feeling of elation went out of Viola's heart.

When she told her mother that she wanted to go up to town for the week-end, Mrs. Egerton made no direct objection. She wondered if the flicker of restlessness in her daughter did not indicate that the child was more in love than she knew.

'One doesn't,' she observed aloud, 'usually go to London

for week-ends, and you won't, of course, be able to see any dressmakers. What are Reggie's plans?'

Viola felt that her mother's eyes were on her and that if she said Reggie wasn't even to be told, she wouldn't be allowed to go.

'I'm writing to Reggie,' she said with a vivid blush, which helped to allay Mrs. Egerton's suspicions.

'He could come down here qui.e easily,' Mrs. Egerton said reflectively. 'In fact, he has written to suggest it.'

'It wouldn't be the same to me,' Viola said quickly. 'As a matter of fact I want to go to church in London.'

'My dear,' said Mrs. Egerton, 'how very odd, you so seldom do! And aren't the rivers of Abana and Pharpar, or whatever the churches here call themselves, quite as good as our poor little Jordan round the corner at home?'

'It's just a fancy,' Viola murmured lamely; 'I wanted to go to a particular church; but it doesn't matter really.' She felt the wind die out of her sails; if her mother persisted she knew she wouldn't go. She couldn't say which church—she'd rather marry Reggie than drag in Jim Barton's name. But Mrs. Egerton didn't persist, she smiled and said,—

'Well, dear, of course if it's a particular church——'

Viola saw in a relieved and horrified instant that she had actually deceived Mrs. Egerton; her mother thought she was going to choose a church for the wedding. She gasped, recovered herself, and accepted the delusion.

Everything was arranged for her to go up easily with Cèleste. Reggie would meet her with the motor. She couldn't get out of it now, and it seemed to Viola as the train slid smoothly off and Cèleste wrapped a rug round her knees, as if she would never be able to get out of anything.

She was being more watched, more catered for and met and handled than she had ever been in her life.

If she didn't make this one outrageous dash she would never have another chance, and she would have to be outrageous in order to make it.

She met Reggie with a smile which she felt was false. He had been told to be tactful, and he was tactful; but of course he wanted to know what she had come up for.

'Oh,' she said, 'it's just a religious fad, and you aren't included till tea-time.'

A religious fad sounded all right to Reggie. He knew his mother was inclined to go off suddenly into churches, and came out of them very much as usual.

But Viola hated herself for saying it, she hated the sparkling contentment in Reggie's eyes. She wanted to make him at least uncomfortable looking. She felt as if her discomfort must break through and warn him; but it requires perception to register even the intense suffering of another human being. Reggie was not perceptive. Nothing came through to him but the fact that she was there, and the prettiest girl on the platform.

Mr. Egerton patted Viola on the back and offered her a glass of port, as if she were an invalid. Nobody asked her any more questions. She slipped out of the house next morning at an unearthly hour in a waterproof. It was raining heavily, the London trees were light green with black stems. The streets were shining and empty. London was finishing its Sunday breakfast. The tubes might have been magic arrangements evolved for Viola's private benefit.

It was far too early for any service that wasn't a celebration, and most of them were over.

Calvary had been filled once and had emptied again, but Viola knew where Jim lived, and she wrote on a card at the door, 'It would be very kind of you to see me for half an hour.—Viola Egerton.' But she did not realise how very kind it would be, because she had no idea what half an hour out of an over-filled Sunday means to a well-known preacher.

A lady in a flowing cassock fingered Viola's card thoughtfully in a very small black entry. Viola had a pang of fear when her eyes fell on Mrs. Hodgkins. Could Jim be married? If he was, she felt that his opinion would cease to have any value for her particular case.

'It is hardly the moment,' began Mrs. Hodgkins in her clear, decisive monotone, and then a door on the left abruptly opened—'If that's Mrs. Bisset drunk again,' remarked a cheerful voice, 'show her in; I told her to come straight here.'

'I'm afraid I'm not drunk,' said Viola a little stiffly.

A chair was pushed back hurriedly and Jim's head appeared round the door.

'You!' he said. He forgot to introduce Mrs. Hodgkins. She stiffened visibly and said, 'I'm very busy just now, Mr. Barton,' and prepared to vanish.

'You'd better come in if you want to,' Jim said to Viola. 'I've got half an hour. Do be an angel,' he added to the retreating lady in the cassock, 'and if Mrs. Bisset does come give her a cup of black coffee and let her lie down for a bit. This is a kind of church house,' he explained to Viola. 'It's not mine really, but they're very kind about letting me see my friends. I'm afraid I've got rather a late breakfast on, there was a row after church this morning and I had to stay out. You've had yours?'

Viola suppressed a shudder at the breakfast table. There was a good deal of bacon on a cracked dish, and though it was not exactly dirty, nothing upon the table matched or shone. She wasn't sure that Jim had shaved, and his hair looked untidier than ever.

'You won't mind if I go on eating while we talk, will you?' he asked. 'You see, church begins at eleven, and I've got to speak. I saw you several Sundays ago at church, and I wondered if I should ever see you again.'

Viola sat down on a black horsehair armchair. If she leaned back her feet didn't touch the floor, and if she leaned forward she nearly slipped off it.

It was not a chair that made confidences easy. Jim looked at her over his coffee cup, with something in his eyes which was alive and laughing. It was not what Viola had expected from a spiritual adviser, but it gave her a companionable feeling.

'I'm not your parishioner,' Viola began, 'and I've no real right to bother you, but your sermon made me think, so you are a little responsible for my coming down on you like this.'

'I hope I am,' said Jim. 'I like being responsible.'

Viola went straight to her point.

'You said, do you remember? that if people weren't honest about what they loved they couldn't really be kind? Because kindness stopped growing if you fed it with lies?'

'Did I say that?' Jim asked. 'Well! It sounds all right

doesn't it? Like most things do before you begin to apply them; and then generally one has to start a little formula of one's own.'

'I think I'm in some kind of a lie now,' Viola said, with her heart beginning to beat hurriedly. 'I didn't mean to be when I started. It didn't look like a lie then. It was just saying "Yes," when some one I liked very much asked me to marry him, and now—and now I see it wasn't enough.'

Jim had gone on with his breakfast, but at this point he pushed his plate away, and resting his elbows on the table, looked across at Viola with knitted brows.

'It's a nuisance saying "Yes" easily,' he agreed. 'It rather lets people in.'

'It has let me in,' said Viola defensively. Jim did not say anything to this, almost as if letting oneself in didn't matter.

'I didn't know what to do,' Viola went on nervously. 'You see, my people like him so much and there's nothing against him really—no kind of excuse——'

Jim nodded. 'It's you there's something against,' he agreed. 'You'll have to face that.'

'If I break my engagement, of course,' said Viola a little sharply. 'But I'm not sure that I ought to break my word—even if I want to.'

'What was your word?' Jim asked unexpectedly. 'I mean—did you say "Yes, I'll marry you"? or "Yes, I love you"? Because, you see, if you said "Yes, I love you," you've broken that already.'

Viola dropped her eyes to the carpet. It was an odd shabby carpet, and it could never have been handsome when it was new.

'I don't know that I said anything,' she observed a little stiffly.

'But even if you were entirely dumb,' objected Jim, 'I suppose you *meant* something? If we could get at what you *meant*——?'

'Oh,' said Viola impatiently, 'as if it matters what I meant then! Can't you see what I mean *now*?'

'No,' said Jim decisively, 'I can't say that I do. You don't seem to me to know what you mean yourself. You say it's

wrong to break your word, quite as if it's being wrong (if it is wrong) would stop you? But why should it stop you? It was obviously wrong to give it, before you knew what you felt—but that didn't stop your giving it—did it?'

'But I didn't know then,' said Viola with crimson cheeks, and tears of anoyance in her eyes, 'It's not as easy as you think. He wanted me to—most awfully—they all did——!'

'They do now, don't they?' interrupted Jim.

'Oh, of course they do,' said Viola, 'or there wouldn't be this bother. But how can I when I don't love him?'

'Ah,' said Jim, 'now you've hit it! That's what you've got to face, isn't it? Do you really know now that you don't love him—better than you knew when you thought you did?'

'Yes,' said Viola after a moment's pause. 'I know perfectly well now. I don't love him.'

'That's something,' Jim agreed. 'You can make a start from that, can't you? What is your main difficulty—that it's wrong to marry a man you don't love, or that it's too uncomfortable to say so?'

Viola's figure stiffened suddenly.

'Is that the way to talk to people when they're in trouble?'

'I don't know that it is,' said Jim. 'But as far as I can see, it's the man who's in love with you who's in trouble, or going to be shortly, not you.'

Viola rose to her feet. 'I am in the most dreadful trouble,' she said with quivering lips, 'or I shouldn't have come to you. But I see I've made a mistake.'

Jim groaned.

'Sit down again, won't you?' he pleaded. 'I thought I'd got to be honest. I can be much nicer than that!'

Viola moved with unchanged dignity towards the door, but before she reached it she looked back at Jim. He was on his feet now, and his eyes rested on her with supplication behind the gleam in them. She hesitated, and without any warning her indignation melted into sudden laughter.

Jim smiled in a relieved way.

'Now we can talk properly,' he said, 'I don't know what you thought I was before, some kind of Johnnie who settled things by rule of thumb, didn't you? You took the nerve out

of me. I'm only a man you don't generally agree with. Of course I'd love to help you—any man would.'

Viola sat down again but she was conscious that she wasn't as free to speak to him about her feelings as she had felt while he was being rude.

'The truth is,' she said doubtfully, 'I don't know if I'm being a coward or not. I'm terrified of hurting people and of being scolded. If I could break my engagement without doing any more harm than keeping it, I'd break it, but I am afraid that breaking it means a fearful lot of harm. And yet if I keep it——' she turned her face away from Jim. 'Well, then, what harm should I do, to any one except myself, I mean?'

'Do you really seriously mean me to answer that?' Jim asked her. His voice was not laughing any more, it had become curiously gentle and kind. Viola did not turn her head but she murmured, 'Yes.'

'Ah,' he said, 'but wouldn't that be too rough on a man? You say he likes you; what'll he feel when he finds you don't like him? You know you can hide all kinds of little things quite easily, and even some big ones—but you can't hide that! You wouldn't want to tie a man up to you—would you—when you haven't anything to give him but the rope?'

'But if he wants it,' said Viola in a small, uncertain voice, 'he must know now, I don't care very much; I suppose he hopes——'

'Is there anthing in what he hopes?' Jim asked. Viola shook her head decisively.

'No,' she said, 'I like him less than I did, and I don't like his life. Reggie is too settled.'

She was not looking at Jim, so that she did not see him start at the name she had mentioned. He pulled himself together sharply; whatever happened to his own heart, he had only to think of hers.

'I should tell him the truth,' he said quietly. 'Just what you've told me. Don't you think so?'

'Oh!' cried Viola with a pang of terror, 'how could I——' He wouldn't believe it!'

'But you can make him believe it,' said Jim relentlessly.

'And if he still wants me, what am I to do?' asked Viola.

'You'll have to do,' said Jim, 'what you've got the grit for. That's what life always comes back to. You know well enough what you ought to do. A man who marries an unloving woman does so because he's mad for her, and can't see sense. Both are bound to suffer, and she deserves to, if she lets him marry her. You're not mad, you see, so it's up to you to get him out of it.'

'Ah,' said Viola, 'but you don't know what it's like——' A mingled pain and anger seized her. How could this man with his fighting eyes know how she hated struggle—how much worse it seemed to her, to pit her fluctuating will against Reggie's sharp desire, than to suffer any mere collapse of personal integrity.

Her reason was silenced in her, and she fell back on tears.

The church bell started ringing. Mrs. Bisset found the front door and had to be diplomatically piloted through the small entry calling loudly for Jim Barton. A dreadful sense of the multiplicity of other people's affairs surged through Viola.

She had come to a place where people couldn't have their their crises in peace.

Jim looked at her bowed head and at the door. He was so nervous that he nearly pulled off the tablecloth.

He could think of nothing to say that could quench her tears.

'Look here,' he began unsteadily, 'you mustn't cry, you really mustn't.'

But Viola cried on.

Jim left the table and stood over her. She wore a ridiculous small toque made out of primroses. He put his hand on it, but she didn't move. He knelt down beside her, but she was still absorbed in the struggle before her. Jim would have given all he possessed to take her battle on himself.

If he had been God he couldn't have given free will to Viola; it seemed too dire a penalty for such a gentle soul to pay for liberty.

'Oh, damn,' he said suddenly, 'I shall have to go to church and leave you.'

She flashed a perplexed, reproachful glance at him from under the primroses. She couldn't remember ever having

been left before by any man who wanted to go to church. He got up awkwardly from his knees. 'I'm sorry,' he muttered without looking at her, 'I can't help you.' Then he went away.

All sorts of noises began and stopped. The front door closed sharply after Jim with a decisiveness that shook the badly-built house; then it shut more quietly under more cautious hands. The church bell's iron tongue jerked its last broken phrase into an astonishing silence. Nobody came to clear the breakfast things away or to show Viola to the door.

There didn't seem to be anybody who cleared things away.

Jim hadn't said good-bye to her. He had felt that if he made any such effort he wouldn't have been able to force himself out of her presence.

Love was shaking him to pieces; it would not leave him judicial and intact.

It threatened to break through into her presence. He felt it shining in his eyes and menacing his voice with its enormous tenderness. He dragged his overwhelming emotion relentlessly away with him, but he felt as if everything in the room must cry aloud to her his absurd, abysmal secret. He couldn't remember what he had said to her, even to blame himself, because his mind was full of all the things he hadn't said.

Viola stopped crying after he had gone. The sun had come out and filled the little trivial room with warmth and kindliness. It wasn't, she thought to herself, a bad little room after all.

She saw a slip of paper lying by Jim's place on the table, and a curious impulse seized her. With a quick look around the room as if she was afraid that some of the very ugly furniture was watching her, she drew out a pencil and wrote on it, 'You have helped me.'

CHAPTER XXXII

WHEN Viola left Jim Barton she saw that every one was pouring into Calvary, and she let herself go with the stream. The service seemed interminable; it had nothing to do with hymns and prayers. All Viola's feelings struggled in it and became part of it.

She could scarcely wait for the preceding prayer to finish and Jim to move with that careless forgetfulness of cassock and surplice to his place in the new pulpit, so that she could hear again what he felt about life.

He stood there with a look of something withheld and yet near, a power that he was waiting for but which would surely come.

Then he leaned over the pulpit with that absurd, untidy lock of tow-coloured hair spreading down to his eyes and talked urgently and honestly to his people.

He spoke as if pleasing God was vital, and all other qualities, Sunday clothes and the power of opinion, as insignificant as last year's newspaper. The look on people's faces changed; they forgot their dinner and their debts and even whether they had been properly noticed, faded out of their minds.

For half an hour second-hand things were second-hand, and only primary things mattered. The question of breaking her engagement became curiously simple to Viola. It would hurt just as much as she had thought it was going to hurt, perhaps more, but it was no longer confusing. No one but Reggie mattered. Even her mother and her formidable resentment dwindled; as for that dreadful ring of people, the outer world, she saw them for what they were—as irrelevant as faces in a dream.

She owed Reggie mercy and truth, and though they seemed conflicting, it was only because mercy is not usually associated with pain, and truth is too frequently considered an unkindness. She saw that unless she hurt Reggie a good deal now,

she would hurt him continuously and much more seriously later. She felt the same rush of strength and refreshment that she had known on the top of Beachy Head. It had seemed then as if the little mixed up life of London had blown over the edge of the cliff. Wedding presents and cardboard boxes had become trifles light as air, and she had been one with the serene and unchangeable life of nature. She felt the same sense of exultation now as if there was a Law which, the moment you came into actual contact with it, set you free. It didn't let you off the consequences of your acts, but it didn't let you be suffocated by all sorts of extras that couldn't really be called consequences at all.

Viola saw that she had been careless and cowardly, and she knew that she must take the consequences and see the person involved take them.

Unfortunately carelessness and cowardice always mean pain and effort for somebody else, and no very kind person with feelings for others, can afford to be either careless or cowardly. Viola was very kind, and her heart ached miserably; but at least she could prevent worse happening, she needn't for an instant more stand her own cowardice. She went away from Poplar feeling like a murderer, but like a murderer who has resolved to face his punishment. She wasn't being hunted any more.

It was a wet, interminable Sunday; her father had stayed in to lunch on purpose to cheer Viola up, but he was full of the gloomiest forebodings. England was already effete, democracy had destroyed it. There were no master minds, and the person who was responsible for the present iniquitous Budget was a fiend. The House of Commons was just a mob of uncultured, insolent people whom one couldn't invite to meet one's family.

Did Viola know where Harry was? No! No one ever did, except Jews and scoundrels off the turf. Harry was unfilial and extravagant. Why didn't he tell his father what he was up to? He expected him to pay for it, whatever it was, and never gave him his confidence.

Viola smoothed Mr. Egerton down. She said quite truly that Harry never confided in anybody, because he had usually forgotten what there was to confide; but on the whole he

never did anything very silly either, did he? Something formed and automatic in him stopped him several yards from precipices. Harry merely wanted, like all young creatures, to look over the top.

She diverted Mr. Egerton with descriptions of their friends at Eastbourne. Her father took a curiously narrow interest in his friends, but he let himself be diverted.

He liked to be reminded whom his friends had married, the size of their families, and the probable extent of their incomes. All the curiosities and expectations of Viola's youthful mind went off him as if his mind was covered with an impenetrable spiritual waterproof.

He remembered, while they were drinking coffee, to ask where Viola had been to church. Viola said 'Calvary' and waited for the first of her explosions.

But nothing exploded at all. Mr. Egerton said he'd never heard of it, and had always thought churches were called after saints, or you remembered them by the squares they were in.

Viola kissed the top of his head and went upstairs to wait for her ordeal. She wondered if middle-aged people closely related to you were ever very much help.

Women usually have to wait for their ordeals and it is not a reassuring process.

Viola sat on a most comfortable sofa with her heart in her mouth. She had every magazine she could possibly want on her lap, and at the end of two hours and a half she couldn't have said if she'd been reading the record of the world's greatest criminal or the Study of the Differential Calculus.

Then Reggie came in. He looked triumphantly well and happy.

He was at the height of human prosperity. Life had denied him very little, and never shaken him at all. He had done brilliantly in business and seen the dreams of his early youth fulfilled. His father and Mr. Egerton, both solid and successful men, relied on his judgment. He was socially the most popular young man of his circle, and engaged to be married at twenty-four to the most lovely girl he knew.

He had just bought a new motor and had never done anything at all discreditable.

Reggie's love for Viola was as real as his self-esteem.

He never looked at a shop window or let his eye rest carelessly on another woman without wondering if what he saw in the window or on the woman might not suit Viola. If she had a finger ache he would have ransacked London to allay it. But he knew nothing at all about her, and her opinions when he listened to them, annoyed him.

Reggie had no wish to be arrogant, and he was generally good-natured, but he couldn't help feeling that most people's misfortunes could be helped, and that if a fellow was too down on his luck, it was almost certain to be his own fault.

He had been ill once, but not painfully, and he had forgotten all about it.

When Viola said, 'Please don't kiss me, Reggie,' he thought she must have a cold, but he had sense enough not to kiss her.

He remembered in time that Mrs. Egerton had said girls must be humoured before marriage and managed afterwards. Viola got up as he entered and sat down on a chair at some little distance from him.

'Reggie,' she said quickly. 'I want to tell you something horrid. Please sit down quietly and let me get through with it.'

Reggie sat down with his legs crossed and his foot shaking impatiently. He thought that Viola looked a little white and 'nervy' and perhaps needed a tonic, but she flushed as she met the firm apprising look of his bright, hard eyes.

'It's not very easy to say, Reggie,' she began apologetically, 'and I want you to believe how sorry and ashamed I am—horribly ashamed—but I've made a great mistake—I can't marry you, I don't love you enough.'

So that was what Mrs. Egerton had meant by having to humour Viola and carting her off to Eastbourne! Reggie had never believed in the Eastbourne plan, and he had always thought that there was something at the bottom of the Wardrobe! Now he would have to use tact.

'But, my dear good child,' he said with his eyes a perceptible shade harder. 'You needn't be in the least sorry.

If there is any mistake I'll shoulder it. You simply don't understand. Girls—the sort of girl at least that you are—never feel much in love until they're married.'

'Oh, I'm not a sort!' cried Viola, with flaming cheeks, 'I'm just like any other girl, and I *must* be in love before I marry!'

Reggie didn't answer her for a moment; his eyes had a curious look as if he was both very pleased and very angry at the same time. Then he got up and took Viola out of her chair. She felt his arms around her, hard and inescapable, and his kisses on her lips and face like fire.

'You little fool! You little fool!' he murmured softly. 'Do you suppose I can't make you love me?'

He really thought violence would make any woman love him.

Viola made no attempt to escape; she left herself passive in his constraining arms, but her mind felt curiously cold and free. There was no response to his passion in her. He let her go at last and walked up and down the room without speaking. She was conscious that something she neither understood nor wanted to understand was taking place in Reggie. Her coldness had put no barrier between them. He wanted her as much as if she wanted him. He could not understand a covenant.

She was vaguely relived when John came in with the tea-table. She waited for him to go out again, and then she said gently, 'It isn't the least use, Reggie—on the contrary, you simply make me see how much I dislike your making love to me.'

She was astonished at herself for being so rude, and she saw that Reggie was astonished too—he was also shocked.

It seemed rather funny to Viola that she should shock Reggie. But she saw in a flash that probably she would have to go on shocking him or else what she said would make no impression on him at all.

'But this is all nonsense,' he said, pulling himself together and standing in front of her. 'You can't mean what you say. Who the devil did you meet down at Eastbourne?'

Viola shook her head; there wouldn't be much use telling Reggie that she'd seen seagulls blown about by the wind and remembered what some one had said in a sermon.

'Oh, no one,' she said wearily.

'Are you telling me the truth?' asked Reggie brutally.

'If I had met any one else at Eastbourne,' said Viola, 'I should have stayed down there. What I felt, I felt before I went down—but not so clearly.'

'Ah,' he said, 'that's it, is it—sheer bad temper about that cursed wardrobe?'

A gleam of laughter passed over Viola's face.

'No,' she said, 'it isn't the wardrobe, Reggie, though it did rather crush me. It's what made the wardrobe so curiously terrible.'

'Do talk sense,' said Reggie irritably; 'I gave way about it, didn't I?'

'Yes, but you liked it,' said Viola.

'I'm damned if I know what you mean!' grumbled Reggie.

Viola made the tea in silence, then she said, 'It's no use, Reggie. We aren't suited. You like one kind of thing and I like another; and it would be just the same all through.'

'Fortunately,' said Reggie, 'we can afford a large house to suit both our tastes. We can have two houses if we like.'

'If we had a hundred,' said Viola inexorably, 'it would be the same thing.'

Viola's heart was still beating uncomfortably fast, but she congratulated herself that the worst was over. Reggie would have to understand now, and if he really understood he wouldn't mind.

When Reggie raised his head and spoke again, the solid ground seemed to fall away from her and she saw that the real struggle had only just begun.

'If you really mean this, Viola,' he said in a queer, desperate tone, 'I shall go to pieces—I can't stand it. Can't you see I'm mad for you? I don't care what you say. I'll give you anything you like—but for God's sake don't turn me down.'

This was the real Reggie. He did not attempt to drink his tea. Viola saw with rising pity and horror that his hands were shaking too much to hold a cup.

Nothing that she said had made any difference. Blows cannot be softened. People can only strike and then shut their eyes so as not to see what they have done, and nothing in Viola helped her to shut her eyes.

'Oh, Reggie!' she cried, 'I'm so frightfully sorry!'

'Don't!' he muttered, 'don't—I can't stand it. Give me a chance. If you turn me out of this room, away from you, I'm done.'

'But I've got to!' Viola cried. 'Don't you see, if it's bad now, how much worse it would be?'

'I don't see anything but you,' said Reggie doggedly.

He sat before her with his trembling hands like a creature mortally bereft.

Only half an hour ago he had come into the room as if the world belonged to him and as if he owed his mastery of it to his own skill. But with his possession menaced, his powers had abruptly left him. He had not got the kind of power which is independent of possession.

'I can't do anything to make it easier!' moaned Viola. 'You'd better go, Reggie. Oh, do be angry with me!'

'I am angry with you,' said Reggie in a low voice, 'angry enough to kill you.'

'Well, kill me, then!' said Viola desperately. 'You see, if it was only being dead—I wouldn't mind; but I can't go on being alive with you!'

'I am not ugly! I'm not deformed!' Reggie burst out suddenly. 'I haven't any bad habits—and I'm not, I should suppose, common or unclean. What the devil have you got against me?'

'I don't love you,' said Viola steadily. 'You aren't what I thought and I'm not what you think, Reggie——'

'Oh, think!' sneered Reggie. 'Do you suppose I care what you think, or what I think either for that matter? You're you, aren't you? What you think won't alter the colour of your eyes or prevent those damned provocative lips of yours from haunting me! Oh, my God!'

He sprang up quickly and began walking up and down the room again. It seemed to Viola as if passion was a cage, and you never got any farther in it than walking up and down a narrow space between iron bars.

Mr. Egerton came in for his tea, and Reggie turned his white, tortured face towards him.

'Your daughter's just been refusing to marry me,' he said. 'Do you know what she means by it?'

Mr. Egerton had seen a good deal of annoyance in his life, but nothing like torture, and he had been more or less comfortable for thirty years. He said, 'Oh nonsense! My dear fellow, nonsense!' because torture really seemed like nonsense to him, and then he looked angrily at Viola.

Both of them looked at Viola. On her lay the full burden of their feelings and their way of escape.

Viola had always longed for a great moment of decision —and now that it had occurred to her, she felt that nothing in the world could be as terrible as to feel your own power and have to use it. If only she could say, 'Oh, no! I don't mean it, really! I was only upset.' They'd believe that, and believing it, they would forgive her. Men can always forgive a woman's weakness. What they can never forgive her is the moment of her strength, and of her truthfulness. She had to answer them, and in order to do it she had to violate every decency she possessed. She had to deliberately smash her world before she could get off (if she could get off then!) with her own soul.

'I'm sorry,' she repeated stubbornly, 'but I can't marry you, Reggie. It's no use father—I can't do it.'

The room went round with her, and she was conscious of their floating faces, but it steadied again. She wasn't going to do anything so easy as to faint.

Reggie swore under his breath and moved towards the door. She heard her father say soothingly that she wasn't quite herself. It was curious that he should say that of her, when for the first time in her life, that which was herself, had risen up in her and acted.

It had hurt her more than she had dreamed that what you did could hurt you, but she knew that if she had to do it all over again, now, with no breath, and the bitter memory of Reggie's stricken eyes acute in her—she would somehow or other find strength to do it.

CHAPTER XXXIII

IF there had been any side to take in favour of Viola Mr. Egerton would have taken it. It would have brought him into opposition with his wife in defence of her own child, and he was usually brought into opposition with her merely in self-defence; and he had, besides, all a father's dislike to the idea of his daughter's marrying any one, even his own choice. But there was no side to take. Viola had broken her engagement without a single creditable excuse.

Mr. Egerton had at first supposed that Reggie had 'done something.' Something which wasn't of the slightest consequence, but which should never be told to a young girl before marriage when she wasn't in a position to judge of it leniently.

Men in love made these disastrous confessions sometimes, and were punished for them with all the vindictive high-handedness of innocence.

But Viola said quite plainly that she had no fault to find with Reggie. He hadn't told her anything at all. It was just a repetition of one of the most confusing of human situations when the horse is brought to water and cannot be persuaded to drink.

Mr. Egerton lost his temper several times in the course of his arguments with Viola, and even appealed to Heaven, a place he never thought of, except when his children disagreed with him! His relationship with Viola had been that common to many fathers. It consisted mainly of inarticulate affection, irrelevant family conversations, and nervous misunderstandings.

Finally he said with a groan. 'Well! I can't do anything with you, I see. You must go down to your mother.'

'Oh, father, must I?' cried Viola. For a moment their eyes met and sounded each other, as if they weren't father and daughter at all, but two human creatures frightened by the crack of the same whip.

Mr. Egerton cleared his throat nervously, and then the smothered jealousy of years overcome the pity of the fellow victim.

'You have always been inseparable from your mother!' he said bitterly. 'It's no use turning to me now.'

Viola spent the journey down in a hundred imaginary interviews with her mother. She hoped she had allayed the full horror of the opening sentences by telegraphing 'Have broken my engagement with Reggie, arrive at 4:15 to-morrow.' She wouldn't have actually to say it. Cèleste sat opposite to her with her mouth nipped up. Nobody had told her anything, but Viola saw that she knew.

She had repacked Viola's things as if the bags of lavender between them had been packets of poison.

Viola had destroyed Cèleste's future with her own. She was one more person whose success and happiness had been bound up in Viola's personal choice, and she wasn't going to let Viola off feeling it.

Viola turned her head away so that she couldn't see Cèleste, and looked out on the soft, neat, green fields for protection. But they were too protected to look very reassuring. She wished the country between London and Eastbourne was wilder and less cared for. Being cared for was such a responsibility, the very trees looked as if they were doing somebody or other credit and daren't for a moment forget it, and grow for themselves.

Viola hoped her mother would be in their private sitting room, it would be dreadful to be alone with her, but it would be more dreadful to go on waiting for it. The short, actual moment of the plunging knife couldn't be as bad as when you just knew it would plunge, and wondered where it would strike you.

She tried to make herself believe that after all there wouldn't be any knife. Her mother loved her so much; they were so like friends, it would be easy to say what she really felt to her mother, if her mother let her. But she knew that their friendship, even their love, was something that lay in Mrs. Egerton's will. You couldn't count on it if you didn't please her.

Mrs. Egerton was sitting waiting for her in the hotel lounge;

her eyes met Viola's inscrutably and without harshness. She scarcely raised her graceful, reclining figure to greet her. They couldn't, of course, say anything with the whole hotel surging and murmuring about them.

The band was playing light, bad music, which brought tears to Viola's eyes.

They were tunes she and Reggie had so often danced to, when her heart was as light as her feet, and everything seemed casual and gay, and without penalties.

She felt sick and bewildered with what she had lost in him.

If only she could have kept him to dance with and laugh with and take her part.

She knew from the moment she saw her mother that what she wanted to escape was still there. She wasn't any freer, really—she was only more exposed.

She was a real culprit now, a person nailed to a sin which does not only blacken him to others, but blackens the world for himself. Viola could only sit and crumble bread and butter and wonder what she had done it for. While her mother looked at her indifferently as if she were a stranger who hadn't been very well brought up.

At last Viola could bear it no longer.

'Did you get my telegram?' she asked abruptly.

Mrs. Egerton's fine eyebrows lifted, and she glanced at Viola as if she had been speaking in too loud a voice.

'My dear,' she said tranquilly, 'should I have had tea ready if I were not expecting you? I understood you to say that you were arriving by the four fifteen.'

Viola's eyes dropped; she remembered the infrequent occasions in her early youth when she had been really naughty. The most terrible thing to face had been that her mother ignored it. It was not until she was forgiven that the question of what she had done had ever been allowed to come up.

'You will like to rest, perhaps,' Mrs. Egerton said, after the ritual of tea. 'You will find your room waiting for you.'

People they knew came up, and Viola felt herself being firmly propelled through wastes of interminable conversations.

It did not seem possible to her that people were still going on with what they had talked about on Saturday; and that

they expected her to go on talking about it too. Surely enough had happened to stop dances and dinner parties, or was there in the world she lived in never anything that was enough to stop them? She found herself with set, shaking lips, and eyes which she tried to keep attentively smiling, agreeing to their incomprehensible arrangements.

This time yesterday afternoon Reggie had been showing her what a man's heart looks like when it has been suddenly exposed by pain, and ever since that, life had been opening and growing more terrible to her, like something relentlessly expanded by invisible elastic. She didn't know that she wanted to see it, but if she had got to see it she did want to know what it meant, and all this bad music and flutter about arrangements prevented her from knowing. They kept calling her back into a world where the only significances are appearances, and nobody notices invisible elastic.

Mrs. Egerton said nothing further to Viola until after dinner. She stared a little when Viola said she had a headache and couldn't play bridge.

'Very well then, dear,' she murmured, 'I'll look in on you on my way up to bed.'

Mrs. Egerton was no earlier than usual. Punctually at eleven o'clock she came into Viola's room. She held her head high, and the soft folds of her pearl-coloured velvet tea-gown followed every movement of her pliable, decisive figure. She had lost heavily at bridge that evening, but she looked as if she had won. She sat down by Viola's bedside, and after asking punctiliously if her head was any better, she said without a change of tone, 'Have you written to the *Morning Post,* yet?'

'Done what?' stammered Viola.

'Announced,' said Mrs. Egerton in a clear expressionless voice, 'the breaking of your engagement. I understand that when people break their promises of marriage they usually have the courtesy to let the fact be known publicly. It saves troublesome private explanations afterwards.'

'Oh, no—not yet——' said Viola. It almost seemed as if her mother wasn't going to try to make her change her mind.

Mrs. Egerton picked up her lace fan and began waving it softly to and fro. She was enormously relieved by Viola's admission, but she did not show any signs of relief.

'It would be interesting to know,' she said without looking at her daughter, 'why you have chosen to break the heart of the nicest man of your acquaintance? That is to say, of course, if the rupture is of your doing, and not as the world will naturally suppose, Reggie's?'

'Oh, mother,' said Viola brokenly. She felt as if the world wouldn't matter if she could only get her mother away from it, but if she couldn't, how was she going to face the world? Her mother had always faced it for them both before.

'No, my dear, I don't at all suppose it,' said Mrs. Egerton, laying down her fan and confronting Viola with unrelenting, narrowed eyes. 'I happen to know that Reginald Ainley is a man of honour as well as a very dear fellow. He would never dream of breaking any one's heart, or spoiling their reputation. Whatever has been done, has been done, I feel sure, by you alone, in a fit of very awkward ignorance—innocence, as you would no doubt prefer my calling it. Mercifully, it is not too late to be perfectly frank with me. What has caused you to take such a violent step?'

'I couldn't marry him,' said Viola. She looked piteously at her mother's mature, wise eyes. 'I didn't love him.'

It was such a poor little narrow plea, flung out in the cold, before a cosmopolitan, experienced mind.

Her mother brushed it impatiently aside.

'My dear,' she said, 'do remember you are not in the servants' hall, or even in the act of writing a penny novelette to be read there. In our class of life we can very well marry a man we like very much without appealing to melodrama.'

'But, mother,' Viola urged, 'not marry him! Not just liking him—how could I? I tried. You don't know how hard I tried, but he wouldn't have liked it himself—he didn't really, *now*—and it would have been worse *after*.'

She had begun to tremble with a strange feeling of physical cold. It was as if everything that warmed and comforted her heart was being dragged relentlessly from her. If her mother didn't understand, her whole world must topple over, because it would show that the foundation of it was false—the life they had lived together, the immense reassurance of their mutual give and take wouldn't be real at all. Either they saw this fundamental thing together, or they had been

deceived in each other. They weren't friends, companions and twin souls—they were just a mother and daughter who had nothing between them but a painful, unequal love.

She put her hand out beseechingly on her mother's lap, but Mrs. Egerton did not touch it. She, too, knew that the crisis of their life together had been reached. If Viola's will failed her now the purpose of her whole life failed.

The love within her receded and turned to ice. All her strength rallied to her will; she must make Viola yield. An appeal to her emotions wouldn't last, but a broken will always lasts, it can never really reassert itself again.

'My very dear child,' she said quietly, 'you know nothing at all about life, though you are very clever and intelligent. I hoped you weren't too clever to trust me; I was not afraid about the engagement, for I thought when you chose we had chosen together. I knew that Reggie would make you happy. You do not know, but as a matter of fact any good young man who is suitable and loves a girl with the best that is in him, can make her happy, unless she is in love with some one else.

'You are not in love with any one else, are you?'

Viola shook her head. She was sure she did not love any one else. But she knew there was a man who would not take the consent of her lips and her eyes and leave untouched the spirit behind them.

It was perhaps true, as her mother said, that the outside of you could be content if you forced it to, with youth, and (what her mother would never have dreamed of calling) passion, and plenty of all the good things you were used to —so used to that they sometimes seemed like chains around your feet; but what of this new old self that had never cared for the doll instead of the puppy, the pretty book against the true book, the sheltered pane instead of the clean cold air?

'The whole thing is so silly,' her mother went on with a delicate, restrained impatience. In a few months' time you would be a contented wife with a delightful home and a perfect husband. You need not fear that Reggie's love would bother you. That only lasts for the first few weeks or months, and you would be to Reggie very much what Reggie would be to you, a nice, intimate contemporary with the same interests as your

own. You need not upset yourself in any way—life is always perfectly simple if you are with suitable people.

'But you must act reasonably, and in the main, as other people act. Breaking an engagement implies that you are either unbalanced or unattractive—and I should extremely resent your being thought either of these things.

'I know men are often stupid and inconsiderate. Can you point out to me any particular thing which Reggie could do, or not do, to please you?'

Viola sat up straight in bed, her dark hair hung down in two long plaits, and her eyes shone with a sudden queer fire.

'Oh, mother,' she said, 'I don't care about being pleased, but there is something I care about which Reggie hasn't got—he hasn't got any feeling—about me being me; and when I try to find out what he is like—I don't like him at all.'

'My dear,' said Mrs. Egerton with a little ironic smile, 'that is where you make your mistake. You shouldn't try to find out what men are like. It is your business to find out what pleases and what displeases them—but nothing more. Women don't really like men, or men, women. We put up with each other for the good of the race.'

'Oh, but that's awful!' cried Viola, sinking back on her pillow. 'That's simply awful! Is there no such thing as love?'

'Oh, yes, there is love,' said Mrs. Egerton, with a sudden vibration in her voice. 'I love you, Viola. I gave you life. I held you little and helpless in my arms. I would have given my body to be burned for you.

'You were a very delicate child. Sometimes I never took my clothes off for five nights together, fighting for you with death, and I won. I gave you day by day all my best thoughts. I had no plan that you were not the centre of. You were in my heart and part of me, as much as when I carried you. If you are beautiful and strong and clever enough to argue with me now, it is with my love for you that you do it. You never look in the glass without seeing my love for you, nor use your cruel young strength without feeling it! Oh, my dear—you say is there any love?—there is a love that never leaves you—and which counts all its honours and its joys only for you! If I had thought you would not be happy with Reggie I would never have let him near you. But you will be happy

with him. He is not a husband who refuses the co-operation of his wife, and yet is not strong enough to do anything alone.

'Reggie will hold power in his hands, his children will be privileged. Your heart will be full of pride and content, and from the moment of your wedding till the day when you are ready to send the life out of your heart, as I am ready now to send you, you will have triumphed.

'And I shall be glad of it, living or dead, I shall be glad of it—as I have never been glad of any triumph of my own!'

Mrs. Egerton leaned back, her breath came quickly, her eyes never left the white, startled face of her child.

All the power in her concentrated itself on this one moment's struggle. She felt her grasp over the child's soul strengthen. She did not say another word to break the binding silence.

Viola could never get away from her now; moment by moment vanished, and it seemed as if there was no protest left in her.

And then she said in a perfectly steady, reasoning little voice, 'But, mother, I don't call that love at all—you just don't give me any room to live.'

Mrs. Egerton rose steadily to her feet; but she was stricken.

The fruit of her life had fallen rotten at the root, she could not bear to look at the cruel child whose touch had brought it down. The ice spread over her heart again, encasing it for ever. Viola did not know what she had done, but a panic seized her—she felt, if her mother had left the room without speaking to her, as if she would never see her again. She cried out, 'Mother! Mother!' But Mrs. Egerton, moving slowly towards the door, never turned her head. There was a curious and awful silence in the room, as if some one had just died.

Viola had asked her mother for space to live; but she had given her mother only space—in which to die.

CHAPTER XXXIV

VIOLA was withdrawn from Eastbourne in disgrace and replanted in London under a cloud.

From morning till night she was aware of a tacit disapproval. No one reproached her in words. It was a relief to receive by post a piece of Mrs. Ainley's mind. The veneer of Reggie's mother gave way under the prick of her maternity.

She wrote four pages of under-scored anger in a perfectly religious tone. But Viola's own mother said nothing, and the things she didn't say remained ineffaceably in Viola's heart.

There is no intimacy so deep, and no hostility so bitter as that between a mother and daughter when their wills conflict.

For twenty-one years Mrs. Egerton and Viola had been literally all the world to each other.

Viola knew when her mother felt a draught, or disliked the wording of a phrase.

The turn of a vexed eyelash or the annoyed inflection of her mother's voice were as sharp as a blow to her. She could not get away from the weight of her mother's anger, it lay on her spirit with the inflexibility of frost.

She knew that her father was angry with her too; he showed it by a curtness of manner and the absence of his usual jokes. He remembered whenever he saw Viola that she was the cause of trouble; but he did not see her very often and he was not thinking of her when she was not there, so that he had no accumulation of anger to visit upon her.

But there was no interval in Mrs. Egerton's anger. It was perfectly smooth, bare and stationary.

Nothing could be done with it but surrender to it, and Viola often felt herself on the verge of surrender. She had none of the secret pleasures of obstinacy, her opinions were not important to her, and her emotions wavered. But there was something in her that called out for air and knew that submission meant suffocation. Her conscience, goaded by perpetual disapproval, enlarged its margin.

It permitted Viola to do things that if the disapproval had lifted would have been automatically forbidden to her.

She was secretly astonished by this feeling of inner latitude, but she took advantage of it.

She went for queer little walks by herself, and insisted on visiting people she knew her mother didn't like—strange people who read books as if they were important and went to Sunday afternoon concerts even when they hadn't got proper seats.

Viola reached the summit of her secret violence when she saw the announcement of a big labour meeting, and decided to attend it.

'What on earth do you want to go to a Labour meeting for?' her father asked her irritably. 'No decent person is ever seen at a place like that! Why, the fellow James Barton is going to speak, and I consider him personally responsible for the dock strike. He's holding up the whole river, confound him! The man ought to be imprisoned and the strike funds seized, and would be if any one knew how to govern the country! And you want to go and hear him talking about it?'

'I want,' said Viola firmly, 'to hear what they have to say for themselves.'

'Say for themselves!' cried Mr. Egerton, helping himself to turbot with a splash, 'what on earth does it matter what fellows like that say for themselves? They get their arguments out of inflammatory rags, and are paid for repeating the lies they find there!'

'Wherever they get their arguments from, I should like to hear them,' said Viola; 'after all, we get our own arguments from newspapers, too, I suppose?'

'Really, my dear child,' said Mrs. Egerton, 'I hope you don't mean to suggest as well, that your father and I draw our income from our political views? But of course you do not know what you are talking about, nor have you yet mentioned with whom you purpose to go?'

'Go—she mustn't go at all,' said Mr. Egerton. 'I can't have it said that my daughter is rushing about to places of that kind.'

Mrs. Egerton changed the conversation. She wanted it to stop with the full force of her husband's authority unwatered down by any further reflections from Viola. She would not forbid Viola to do anything herself. She had gone

beyond the intimacy of orders, but she wanted her to be prevented from attending the meeting. She did not realise that Viola had moved also, she had gone beyond the force of prevention.

She had been hanged for lambs for three penitential weeks, and now she hardened her heart and presented her parents with a sheep.

The night of the meeting arrived, and Viola, having dressed as usual for dinner, went out and took her latchkey.

She was sorry afterwards that she wore a blue velvet coat trimmed with ermine and her pearls, but she had never been to a Labour meeting before, and she vaguely intended to join her mother at a reception afterwards.

The hall was crammed to its capacious brim, almost everybody was dressed in something dark that looked a little rough. A great many women wore glasses and must have been school teachers; there were shop-girls, too, who looked a little smarter, but most of the audience were men.

Viola had never seen so many men before in her life—they were like an army. Men with curious white lustreless faces and blue shadows under their eyes, who worked in mines or were engineers, and had had the colour bleached out of them by furnaces.

Hundreds of narrow-chested young men who had never had enough to eat, or games to play themselves alive; clerks and shop-men and factory hands, and the unlabelled multitude of fugitive Londoners, who can be divided chiefly by age. When they were young their salaries were big enough to make them a little irresponsible; they bought large ties and their eyes had a flicker of expectation. Sometimes they played football and sometimes they were in love. But when they were middle-aged the flicker in their eyes went out. They did not make money enough for expectations, they struggled on, driven by domestic difficulties under the harrow of their narrow incomes.

Viola sat back thoughtfully in her seat and studied the faces around her.

There was something odd and stirring in the air as if every man and woman in the hall had a personal stake and knew what they meant by it.

The seat by Viola's side was empty, but just before the meeting began a girl slipped unobtrusively into it. She had an expressionless face, which was very nearly pretty, and odd eyes which seemed to hover over what she looked on, as if she might, if it were worth while, strike.

She looked quite well off, but as if she were accustomed to going about a good deal alone.

She glanced at Viola, her pearls, her soft blue velvet cloak, and down at her little gray suède slippers with paste buckles. It was an impersonal glance, bright and hard, like an animal's in a hedge. Viola wondered if the girl's eyes had ever looked friendly.

The meeting opened dully with a radical peer. None of the audience could forget he was a peer, and he couldn't forget he was a radical.

He spent most of his time explaining how unimportant he was, while the people waited.

The vast audience grew restless under his explanations, they cheered good-naturedly, but they wanted him to stop. They knew he was unimportant. The chairman, a shrewd, heavy-browed man with luminous eyes, introduced each of the speakers in turn, he made no speeches himself, but he said plainly and loudly who each speaker was and what subject he was going to speak about.

It was a large programme, and Viola was astonished at the clearness and character of the speakers.

Sometimes they began stumblingly, as if the huge crowded hall blocked their utterance and shook their nerves, but after a moment or two of floundering, something in the urgency of what they had to say, or a wave of fellow-feeling from their audience drew them into self-forgetfulness.

These men were there to say what they had thought about for years. They had run risks to say it and gone to great expense.

They could not afford to fail in saying what they meant.

Their words came out steadily, solidly, with the weight of familiar facts.

Viola had often been to political meetings before, but the clear, fluent platitudes of people she agreed with, had passed over her mind as colourlessly as water.

These words shook her.

One by one men got up and said what their work was like. Very few of them had any style beyond their sincerity. They were tied to narrow vocabularies. But they were all workers, and the people who listened to them were workers. Some of them worked with their hands and some with their heads, but they were part of the same correspondence between personal effort and daily bread.

Very few people were there for fun or had any resources that came without struggle.

It was this which gave to the meeting what Viola had never felt before, an acuteness of interest and an extraordinary comradeship.

None of these people knew each other, but they knew one fact about each other which made them feel as compact and involved as a family.

When a mill girl from the north in clogs and a shawl got up and stood facing the gathered multitudes of London, to tell them she had been fined for sneezing, the angry wave that stirred the whole audience was as personal as if they had shared the injustice. They knew what fines meant. They knew the personal humiliation of them and the havoc they made in the weekly budget.

Some of them could check from personal experience the tyrannical inhibitions of the living-in system, and most of them knew the deadly ruthlessness of lock-outs for unpunctuality.

It seemed incredible to Viola that two hundred workers could be left in a strange neighbourhood without shelter, losing half a day's pay because of a belated train.

She was stirred to the bottom of her heart by tragedies newspapers never tell, tragedies that do not end fatally because they do not end at all.

She listened with burning cheeks to the sometimes reasonable and sometimes merely vindictive diatribes against men in the position of her father. Their privileges, their perfunctory attention to their work-people's claims, their inaccessibility.

No one there spoke up for their benevolence. Viola had heard so much always about the care and kindness of capitalists, that she had been unable to judge fairly of a system in which

cultured good-heartedness had such an apparent scope. She had not thought of poor people as necessarily bad, but she had taken for granted that they were ignorant, and without the capacity for knowledge; and that power is only safe with knowledge, and that knowledge does not filter down much beneath four hundred a year.

Her mind flinched before Jim's name on the programme. He was to speak of the issue between her father himself (her father and Reggie, and Reggie's father) and the dockers. She dreaded it so much that she felt cold and trembled, and she wanted it so much that nothing else in the world seemed to matter.

She had forgotten her private problems.

Her heart, bewildered and submerged in its personal struggle, was flung out suddenly on to a wider sea.

She held her head up with a relieved sense as if she were breathing again.

People weren't disgraceful because they stood out for freedom. They were only disgraceful when they tried to stop other people from standing out, or felt sure they were right and nothing need be changed because they were not personally hampered.

Viola was glad she was hampered now, it was her only point of union with the people around her.

There was an interval half-way through the meeting. She turned to the girl beside her.

'Isn't it wonderful?' she said eagerly. 'I've never heard anything in the least like it before.'

The girl lifted her quick, hovering eyes to Viola without answering her for a moment; then she said, 'I don't often come to Labour meetings myself, but it happens my brother is to speak at this one, and they gave me a free ticket at the door.'

'Your brother!' cried Viola. 'How awfully interesting! Has he spoken yet?'

The girl shook her head.

'I see him coming on to the platform now,' she said. 'He speaks for the dockers.'

'Oh!' cried Viola in astonishment, 'but that's Jim Barton

—is he your brother? I admire him so much—I've heard him preach twice.'

'Have you?' said Eliza without enthusiasm. 'I can't say that I have. He seems to be fond of religion.'

'It must be wonderful to have a brother like that!' Viola went on. 'Do you live with him and take care of him?' Then she remembered the lady with the mortar-board, and somehow or other Viola could not connect the lady with the mortar-board and Eliza.

'I don't,' said Eliza quietly, 'hold much with religion myself. Of course I don't say Jim hasn't done wisely by sticking to it. He needed education and now he's got it. So that's all to the good. But he doesn't make what he might out of it.' Eliza dismissed Jim and his projects. She looked more fixedly at Viola. 'You won't mind my saying it,' she asked, 'will you, but do you think it's very safe to wear pearls in a big meeting like this? There are rough people about.'

'Oh, thank you,' said Viola, 'but they have a safety catch; I think they must be all right, don't you? Papa said it was such a good one.'

Eliza's eyes raised themselves to the catch and looked away again. 'I should put them in my handbag if I were you,' she said, 'a man might make a snatch at them coming out.'

Viola obediently unfastened her pearls and thrust them into her handbag. 'Thanks so much for warning me,' she said, 'though I can hardly believe any of these people would want to snatch pearls.'

'I don't know why not,' said Eliza a little flatly. 'Most of them are poor, and poor people aren't honest as a rule unless they have to be. I dare say you haven't noticed it, because you'd hardly miss what you lost. But people like me have to be careful. It matters to us not to lose things.'

Viola hesitated. 'You don't remind me very much of your brother,' she said after a pause.

'I'm not like my brother,' replied Eliza dryly. 'Jim and I don't often meet.'

'But you will to-night,' pleaded Viola. 'It would be so thrilling to tell him to come and speak to us, especially if he doesn't know you're here.'

'Well, I don't mind if you do,' said Eliza good-naturedly.

'Let's send a man with a note to him now,' Viola said quickly.

'Not before he's spoken,' said Eliza with decision. 'The man mustn't even give him the note till he's finished.'

Viola thought this was very considerate of Eliza. It might put Jim off his speech to know they were there unexpectedly.

The audience were back in their seats by now. An ex-Factory Inspector spoke first, and then Jim.

Viola leaned forward oblivious of anything in the world but Jim's face. It was very far away and small. Jim sat at the back of the platform. He had no nervous habits as he waited. He leaned forward to listen to the speaker as if he were absorbed. When the Chairman rose to introduce him, he flung back his head, and the relentless flaxen lock which would never lie flat fell forward on to his forehead. He came to the front of the platform with quick firm steps, looking straight at his audience. He did not see them. Jim never saw his audiences—he saw only what he had to say, point after point, in burning words. He read his speeches out of the listening air.

Viola's breath came so unevenly she could hardly catch his opening words. She felt as if all her life and all who were dear to her were at his mercy. But Jim made no personal attacks.

He was not bitter, and he was as nearly without prejudice as an enthusiast can be. He spoke of the dockers' cause point by point, and out of his personal experience, as the other speakers had done, but he spoke as no one else had yet done—with imagination.

He was not content with facts as they were; he showed without exaggeration and with deadly simplicity what the facts meant.

No one else had made Viola see what really happens to people who can't get justice.

The other speakers had shown the faults of a system, but Jim showed what became of human beings when they had been under the faults of a system. Viola forgot about her father; she forgot that if Jim was right, everything that she believed in was wrong. She forgot everything but the issue between the dockers and the owners. She felt herself drawn into their stubborn tussle, passionately upon the dockers' side.

Jim did nothing to minimise what it meant if their struggle succeeded; sooner or later it would bring about the crash and breakage of her world.

There was not a sound or stir in all the building but his voice. Sometimes Jim would stop with a queer little jerk of his head, and let out a flying, fiery joke which sent a sharp burst of laughter through his audience. Sometimes he would lift his hand with an awkward gesture, and his voice rising suddenly with passion would lose its penetrating cockney accent and shake his hearers with its intensity. Every now and then after an impressive point he paused, and while he paused his whole audience swung into silence with him. He ended with a sudden drop on to a level phrase, not of petition, but of statement. It was as if he had come through sympathy and had nothing left but fact.

Viola gave a long sigh of relief. She had been unbearably stirred, and under the stir her mind had changed. She knew that she would never look at anything in quite the same way again. Eliza sat unmoved and apparently uninterested. She watched a man step forward and give Jim Viola's note.

Jim got up at once as if there was something urgent in it.

'Did you ever hear any one speak like your brother?' Viola asked her breathlessly.

Eliza paused for a moment; a curious reflective look passed over her face.

'He has a good deal to say for himself,' she said at last. 'I grant you. That's what education does, but it seems to me a pity he should pour it all out like this. It isn't, you see, much of a profession. I understand they don't pay him anything for his speeches.'

'But I suppose his profession,' said Viola tentatively, 'is helping poor people, isn't it?'

Eliza answered her with a certain bitterness.

'He might help them who help themselves,' she said coldly. 'Not those who can't. But Jim was always soft.'

Viola stared at her apprehensively. There was something in the small, neat figure beside her which had the effect of a drop of acid.

Viola turned, with a curious feeling of relief as if she had been near something dangerous, towards Jim. He came

quickly, and as he reached Viola's side his eyes and Eliza's met across her with the quick, upward jerk of a knife.

'How on earth,' Jim muttered, 'did you turn up here, Eliza?'

Somebody else began to speak. Jim looked curiously disturbed and upset—it was a moment or two before Viola made him smile at her, and then they found that Eliza had gone! She must have moved like a streak of lightning in the interval when their eyes met. How she had slipped along the row and up the narrow aisle to the door at the top was a mystery, but when they turned their heads to look for her she was nowhere in sight.

'The devil! She's gone!' Jim muttered to himself.

'She really *was* your sister?' Viola asked. She had a funny sensation as if she would rather Eliza hadn't been Jim's sister; but he nodded grudgingly.

Viola did not hear what any of the other speakers said. She was absorbed in a curious consciousness of the man beside her. He was a common man, nothing in him had changed from the first night she saw him, but she was losing sight, losing sight with a curious haste, of all his little mannerisms. It was as if a tide was covering over a vast expanse of mud flats. The mud was there still, but it was hidden, glorified by racing waters—there was no sense in it any more of being a thing to despise. Her imagination had begun to yield to him. She knew that there was largeness in him, and a power that could stand any man's ridicule. He wasn't bounded by rules, or by arrangements, and he wouldn't topple over if anything awkward happened.

Viola had always thought it was security to be with people who seldom let awkward things happen, who, when they nevertheless did happen, had to perfection the art of saving themselves.

But that was not Jim's strength. With him the security would be that the social disaster didn't matter, simply didn't count whether it happened or not.

Jim had none of the insolent mastery which Reggie understood and used in all his relations with women. He had roused and moved her, humiliated and hurt her, and yet now he was beside her, he looked shy and very humble, as if he only wanted not to be in her way.

It was not until they got up to go that Viola discovered, in spite of Eliza's kind precautions, that her pearls were gone.

It surprised Viola that Jim should care so much about the loss of pearls.

He looked as shaken and bereft as if a terrible accident had happened.

'Come,' she said laughingly, 'they're only property, and you've been telling us to-night just how bad property is for us!'

'Yes,' he said grimly, 'you're right, I did; but I happen to think other people's property rather worse for us than our own.'

For a moment she wondered if he was even going to take her home.

Then he said abruptly, 'Am I to walk back with you?' He would not speak about anything but the pearls. He made her tell him every particular, and he listened intently to everything about them, even Eliza's warning, and the handbag. He told her that directly he had taken her back he would go straight to Scotland Yard for her.

Viola wanted to tell him that his words had changed her life, but he did not seem to want to hear how she had liked his speech.

Almost before he reached her door he said 'Good-bye,' without holding out his hand.

She put her hand on his arm. 'Do you think,' she said, 'that the poor thief will get some dreadful long sentence if he's caught? I do wish you wouldn't go to Scotland Yard for me.' But she saw that her wish was useless.

'Somebody's life will be smashed up, no doubt,' he answered, 'but you ought to get your pearls back just the same.'

'But why will you make me feel so miserable,' she pleaded; 'I told you I didn't want them.'

'It'll be much worse,' he said in a softened voice, 'for the person who keeps them. It's always worse for people not to get caught.'

Viola held out her hand to him, but he stepped quickly away from it.

'Oh,' she said, half laughing, half crying, 'do you hate me, Mr. Barton, just because I had my pearls stolen?'

Jim shook his head; his eyes had a hard light in them as if he were wrestling with a physical opponent.

'I wish to Heaven I did!' he said hoarsely. 'I'm handicapped by the opposite feeling. I'm fighting your father to a finish. It'll be him or me down in the end of it. And you? I can't get you out of my head. It hurts like fun to look at you, and remember all you stand for. But I suppose I'd rather have the eyes out of my head than not look at you!

'You have a home, and every one who sees you loves you, don't they? They'd be mad if they didn't. You don't know what it is to have nothing else to care about but a woman you'll never touch!

'This is your house, isn't it? I wish to heaven I'd never set foot in it. Don't be frightened! Everything in the world is on your side, even my heart.

'You're as safe from me as if I hated you—only don't ask impossible things of me. Don't you see, standing there staring at me with your innocent eyes that nothing ever happened to—why, I'm a bit upset. My sister Eliza has just run off with your pearls.'

Viola moved back suddenly as if Jim had struck her in the face. He had told her too much, she could not take it in, she didn't want to take it in; and before she had regained her self-control he had left her. She was quite safe now, a policeman sauntered slowly towards the house.

Jim had left her close to her own doorstep. A flight of theatre taxis swept the Square. People she knew, two doors off, were giving a dance.

Viola slipped into the hall and closed the door behind her.

It was all safe and soft, quiet and full of light. There was no violence there. But she had been face to face with violence—incredible violence of feeling and taste. She had to sit down suddenly to save herself from falling.

The violence hadn't all been left outside, some of it was in her swiftly beating heart, and in her failure of breath, and in something far more permanent and real than any shock to her senses.

There was a violence in the fact that although a common man had told her that he loved her, she had not been able to feel angry, nor even ashamed.

CHAPTER XXXV

JIM tore himself away from Viola with an angry heart. It was too hard that she should choose this moment of his deepest abasement to taunt him with her friendliness. Couldn't she see he was down and out?

Roused by the vehemence of his own speech he had sat by her side for half the evening, fighting with his love for her.

He had never dreamed human love was like this, a creature that took no denial, choked and tortured you for expression, flooded you like light, and retreated from you with the same astonishing rapidity, leaving you in utter darkness.

Jim had felt full of gentleness and chivalry for Viola one moment, and full of fierceness and stubborn anger against her the next. His shame about Eliza confused his judgment.

He wanted to let Viola alone and keep her ignorant of his despair, and then crowding in upon this want rushed a sharp desire to see her share his knowledge, and let her know, if only for a moment his own personal stress.

Well, he had let her know; he had shocked her like some savage, clumsy animal and frightened her away from him for ever.

Wivvle wouldn't have shocked her. Wivvle could break your heart and be like a bog under your feet, but he wouldn't, beneath any weight of ineptitude, turn nasty.

It was always Wivvle and not Ainley to whom Jim compared himself in his moments of abasement. Ainley hadn't that indefinable charm which made the idea of shock or offence from Wivvle inconceivable.

In all moments of crisis Jim felt the roughness of his origin break out in him. The men spoke of his fierceness as powerful and splendid. 'There's old Jim roused at last!' they would say appreciatively. But Jim dreaded his moments of passion, he knew them for what they were—dangerous defeats of the will.

His gusts of feeling shook him when he was at his weakest. Strength wasn't violence, it was steadiness. It wasn't shaking other people, it was keeping your own heart unshaken when everything else around you was unsteady.

The summer night soothed him like the touch of a hand. London, with all its trivial havoc of the day, was covered by the soft, friendly dark.

The air tasted of far away orchards, the buses had stopped and the swift, infrequent motors plunging through the night only broke for a moment the increasing silences.

Jim walked quickly across the Square and by the solid shadow of the Park. His anger flickered and went out. He turned his thoughts down into his heart till they found rest. His love for Viola went deeper than the hunger for possession.

After all, he did possess her still, however much he had lost her. She was beautiful enough to go on loving, even if she didn't belong to him.

Life was no longer an impersonal job; once she had come to him for help, and once she had stood there and wanted him for herself—wanted him, however little, as a friend.

Some wall in his mind had broken down at her touch, and let in a new light upon the world. Jim had never understood lovers before. The foolish and the terrible things they did to satisfy their hearts had seemed unreal and puzzling to him.

His own controlled passions and steady common sense had recoiled before the blind and headlong eagerness of this strange hunger in the dark.

He had thought love a little thing to distract and ruin lives, and not enough to crown them. He would never feel it a little thing again, and if he could not have the love he wanted, he found that his love for men and women was quickened even by its loss.

He knew even now in this first quiet hour, that people were suddenly as important to him as causes. He cared with a new depth for the wisps of humanity, blown like thistledown across a field on to embankment benches.

The lost and fallen by the way did not seem to him despicable any more; he thought of them with tenderness. They had found all the lessons of life too hard to bear, and, slipping

out of them, had reached the hardest of all—and were learning it.

Even his anger against Eliza seemed a less final thing. He wished that he could meet her now with this new feeling in him. But Eliza had not sunk to the embankment. She was not like thistledown, she was more like the wind that drove it.

Eliza had slipped into Piccadilly Circus and by an inconspicuous route worked her way home to the most evasive of her haunts. She supposed that Jim had found her out, but she thought that, for his own sake, he would hold his tongue.

She had no fear of Viola whatever. Viola was soft.

Eliza would have been as astonished as she would have been furious if she had known that Jim meant to report her to the police. She wouldn't have seen the sense of it.

But not even his new tenderness for her deflected Jim. It was horrible to think of Eliza caught and behind bars, but his only alternative was more horrible still—always to see her predatory and hovering with the world her victim.

Jim knew the Yard well; he had gone there again and again to befriend criminals, but never to report them. He was not afraid or ashamed of the detectives' keen impersonal knowledge.

It wasn't people's knowing that Jim minded most about Eliza, it was having to stand there as if he were different from her, and on the side of the world, and not her brother and on her side against all her enemies.

It was monstrous to him to have to tell against her—all his instinct was with Eliza and against the world. But his reason wasn't His reason pointed out that though the world was almost always wrong in its methods it was seldom wrong in its aims.

People like Eliza couldn't be allowed to prey on the innocent. You had got, if you cared for any system of protection at all, to be on the side of protection against robbery. Eliza wouldn't be any worse for going to prison; she would always be as bad as she could. The only limit Eliza set on crime was that of her own capacity for carrying it out.

The moon stood high above the river, catching the small gardens under Westminster. Rodin's 'Burghers of Calais,'

huddled against the dark mass of Parliament buildings, stood out sharp and clear on its small silvered patch of grass.

They knew what they were about, these patient, reluctant men, giving themselves up with halters on their necks (to save their free city) into the hands of Kings. They didn't like it. Their wavering, huge hands and dragging feet revealed their natural shrinking from death. But they had perfectly agreed to it. They were the steadiest of champions, men who had counted the cost and knew that it was worth while to pay it.

It was a great comfort to Jim to see them, and to feel that they were going to do what they had to do without enthusiasm. They were the first heroes he had ever seen who hadn't any charm.

They helped him to go to Scotland Yard and give his evidence against Eliza.

The Superintendent whom he saw was extremely considerate.

'You'd be surprised,' he said after he had taken down the details of Jim's story, 'what people have criminals in their families. It seems to go about like measles, stealing does, taking first one and then the other. A pity there isn't a rash to trace them by, that's all.

'Now, about your sister, you'll bring us all the information that comes your way, and when we're on her track (and in the long run we catch out the neatest if they're habitual) we'll communicate with you. But don't expect anything in a hurry, and I'll advise Mr. Egerton not to advertise or make a fuss. Your sister won't sell the necklace as a necklace—it'll go pearl by pearl, and it'll take some tracing, and if she thinks we aren't moving she'll be all the more likely to slip up. I only wish we knew as much as you do about river thieves, but I suppose you'd as soon tell me as take a dive off the Bridge?'

Jim nodded, but he winced as he turned away from the inspector. Every one, apparently, was safe with him, except his sister.

Jim had done what he had set out to do, but it would have been a good deal easier if he could have done it with the pride and anger he had felt when he left Viola. It was like paying Viola back to give up Eliza then, but to give her up

when his love had got the better of his temper was like black treachery.

He felt as if nothing beautiful could ever happen to him again.

He was nearly thirty, and for the rest of his life he would do what he meant, and have nothing beyond what he expected.

After all, the Burghers of Calais, walking out to their doom with their halters around their necks, had got off better than Jim. They had worn their own halters and thought they were going to die, and Jim had put a halter on somebody else's neck, and knew that he was going to face nothing so final or so adventurous as death.

CHAPTER XXXVI

REGGIE had gone abroad. He couldn't face London or himself in his accustomed life. He was a popular man, and every one would have taken his side; but they would have been very sorry for him. Reggie had always succeeded in everything he had undertaken, and he had never had to have any one sorry for him before.

It was a most serious and inconvenient moment for Reggie to leave his business, but he liked the feeling that he was risking great financial loss because of Viola's heartlessness. The Egertons were risking great financial loss as well.

Reggie had already risen out of flat grief into distinguishing preferences. He was pleased to realise that he was looking white and desperate, and that he had the most expensive room with the best view of the Mediterranean in the hotel. He did not care in the least about the view, but he felt that a man with a broken heart ought to have the best of everything.

Reggie was young and astonished at not getting what he wanted. It was incredible that pain should lay violent hands upon him, but his heart was not broken because he had not gone deep enough into love to risk his inner self. He was like a child forcibly deprived of a delightful toy, but not like some one who has lost part of himself, and has to take up a weakened life without an incentive.

He opened his letters eagerly to see how badly everything was going without him.

Fortunately, things were going quite badly enough. The Dock Strike had started and promised to be the longest, fiercest, and most unsatisfactory strike that the dock and ship owners had ever strangled.

There was already talk of a Government commission, and if it came off, more or less impartial people would be allowed to study profits and conditions.

Mr. Egerton wrote hopelessly about it. He couldn't put up

a good case, because he was so enraged at having to put up a case at all.

He felt as if he had been born right, whereas Reggie was perfectly aware that righteousness could, and even at moments must, be worked. Feeling sure was sentimental nonsense. You had to look sharp and prove things. Mr. Egerton wrote that Jim Barton was at the bottom of it all. He was fighting for a Government commission and keeping the men quiet.

There was no sabotage and less drinking than usual. The strike relief was well organised, and though people suffered, there was nothing inordinate about their suffering.

It was a summer strike and the funds were very well administered. The owners might get men down from the north, but it was an appalling expense, and they knew that they wouldn't be left alone to work in peace if they got them there. Jim Barton would be at them as he was day and night at the strikers, with that hideous vivid gift he had of pouring his vitality under other people's skins.

Reggie cursed into his coffee cup when he thought of it. He was a clear, good-tempered speaker himself, but he wasn't an orator.

Mr. Egerton did not mention Viola until the end of his letter, then he wrote: 'I hear Viola is going to a Labour meeting against my express wishes. I think her head has been completely turned, but I'm sure I don't know what has done it. Perhaps we oughtn't to have had that bounder to dinner.'

Reggie read the sentence twice. Was it conceivable that there had been another man after all? Could the little, flower-like, well-bred girl he had chosen for himself have stooped to think about this man of no birth, who had risen laboriously above dropped 'h's' and never above his accent, who in any decent company must always be a man apart? You couldn't, Reggie thought, for all his education, mistake Barton for a gentleman?

Reggie had one of those brains which always has all its information ready for use. Neither anger, nor pity, not even fairness, ever deflected him from using his wits.

He ran over Jim's career at the Bligh's, and every disagreeable incident of their joint existence came at his call.

He had paid the big, truculent lump of a hog out for knocking him down on the lawn. Wivvle would never have had the sense or the nerve to have got out of his scrape through Barton, if it hadn't been for Reggie. That unexplained scrape attached itself remorselessly to Jim Barton. The Bligh's household would never forget it—the mention of Jim Barton, if he was mentioned, would invariably bring back the cloud, and it might be so arranged that he would be mentioned. Mrs. Egerton was a very clever woman, and so was Mrs. Bligh; they were distant cousins and they both had daughters.

Reggie finished his breakfast with more appetite than he had begun it; he smoked a cigarette thoughtfully and then wrote a long, neat, unhurried letter to Mrs. Egerton.

Mrs. Egerton received the letter at the same time as Celeste gave her Viola's defiant message about the Labour meeting. It was too late to stop Viola going, but it wasn't too late to avert the consequences.

Mrs. Egerton went out as usual, but she left word that she would see her daughter before breakfast next morning.

The house was empty when Viola returned, as empty as a big glittering shell. Mr. Egerton had gone to his club. Harry was dancing the tango.

She went through the noiseless hall, and up the wide staircase to her room, without seeing even a servant. The silence, the emptiness and the light frightened her. She was haunted by the thought of Eliza's small, hard face, and burning eyes. It was the first time in Viola's life that she had come in contact with the hardness of evil. She realised suddenly that people who had no quarrel with you at all might do terrible things to hurt you. All the crimes she had ever read of flashed into her mind, their ugliness and their precision. She had always felt vaguely sorry for criminals before, as for those unfortunate people who went a little too far—but she hadn't known that they had faces like Eliza.

Why hadn't she called Jim back and stopped him? She had nearly called him, but the policeman with his heavy tread had startled her as if it were she who was being pursued.

Or was it that after all custom had been too much for Viola, and that strips of scarlet cloth two doors off had mocked at her as if she had betrayed its chief treasure?

She was a coward; she shouldn't have let Jim go without a word of kindness. He might fall under suspicion: he had been with her when Eliza left them. People would say, 'That's the kind of person who leads a strike,' and all that wonderful sense of fellowship she had felt to-night would be shaken and blotted out by the loss of a wretched string of pearls.

Viola felt confused by the enormity of chance. Why had she worn her pearls, or sent for Jim, or talked to Eliza? And, above all, why had Jim said so stupidly and so fiercely, just when she needed all her wits about her to help him, that he would give his soul to touch her?

She had heard men use that phrase before, but they hadn't meant it—nor had they really, if they had taken the trouble to look for one—much of a soul to produce. They simply meant they rather wanted to kiss her. Jim had looked at her as if her kiss was worth a kingdom to him.

His eyes had shaken her; it was as if by looking he had held her closer than any man had ever held her before; and yet when he had said that she was as safe with him as if he hated her, she had known that it was true.

You could trust most men up to a certain conventional point, but not beyond. There was no point, no check in the sea of trust she felt for Jim.

She had been frightened by the strength of his passion, and shocked because after all he was a common man; but she hadn't been frightened by what might happen to her with this common man.

Of course any relation between them was impossible, what Jim had said was perfectly true. He was fighting her father, and Eliza was his sister. Viola couldn't make friends with a person, however interesting, whose sister stole jewelry. There was Jim's religion too. Viola didn't understand religion; Jim's stood behind him, queer and ominous as a cloud. She wasn't sure what it could do to him, but she knew she feared it.

Religion when it is real is as terrible as crime and as dividing.

It was what Jim meant all the time; even when he was alone.

Viola was sure of this because he hadn't touched her hand, or waited for an answer. She liked him more for these two

things than she liked him for anything; but it made her feel how very dangerous religion might be.

She leaned out of the window into the large, quiet Square. There was a light, desultory breeze moving the leaves of the Square garden. She watched them swing to and fro, dark and alive, like her young thoughts.

She listened with a new quickening of the heart to the far-off sounds of the city, until they sank to rest.

Something curious had happened to the night; everything Viola saw and heard was more vivid to her, and more acute; even the silence brought with it a deeper significance.

The dawn came imperceptibly, the black, curved Square grew gray and the lamp light pale. Birds twittered uncertainly, and were still.

Night prowlers slipped, like shadows, across the Square. The air grew cool and fresh as if it had subdued the light, but still Viola could not bear to leave the window. She did not want to shut her eyes and leave the new touched world.

When she slept at last she dreamed that her string of pearls was broken, and the pearls alive and scattering about her feet. She wanted to escape from them, but they pursued her, crying out that she belonged to them and could never escape.

In the morning Cèleste told her that her mother wished to see her directly she was dressed.

Viola went to her mother's room before breakfast.

Mrs. Egerton never began a difficult conversation with any one by stating what she had to say. She always, as far as it was open to her, laid waste the mind of her adversary until she had reached the end of his resources. Then carefully and without hurry she inserted what she intended to say, into the void.

She talked to Viola for half an hour the next morning before she mentioned Mrs. Bligh.

She heard all that Viola had to tell her about the Labour meeting and the loss of the pearls.

She forbore from pointing any moral, she did not even stoop to connect the two incidents, though Viola knew that

her mother felt it to be obvious that people who went to Labour meetings would lose pearls.

Viola said in defence of this unattacked citadel that she had never seen so many people before, and supposed that among all those thousands there might very well be a pick-pocket or two. Mrs. Egerton looked as if it was a pity so many people were there for such an immoral purpose, whether they were pickpockets or not, but she did not say so.

Viola gave up the Labour meeting. She said diffidently and without purpose that it had been a very warm night and must be beautiful in the country just now.

'I think it would be better for you to be there,' her mother agreed tranquilly.

If she had said, 'Your conduct is disobedient, you are no longer to be trusted, you break engagements, lose pearls and have vulgar tastes, therefore you are better in the country, where the opportunities for exposing these failings are fewer,' she could not have made her meaning clearer.

Viola bowed her head in acknowledgment of her sins. She felt as if she were moving under a load of guilt. She wanted to be punished and exiled. She didn't mind what happened to her as long as she didn't have to confess. She hadn't really done anything dreadful, even though she was not quite sure what it was.

Her mother waited a little for Viola to protest or to make some suggestion, but Viola said nothing.

'I have just been telephoning to dear Annette Bligh,' Mrs. Egerton said after a sufficient pause. 'They haven't any of their tiresome pupils there just now, and she very kindly suggests taking you. You have no objection to going there, I suppose?'

'No, mother,' said Viola. She had so little objection that she wondered with a fresh pang of remorse whether her mother remembered, or if she had ever known, that Jim Barton had been one of the Bligh's tiresome pupils.

She raised her eyes to her mother's, her candid, conscience-stricken eyes. 'I'm so dreadfully sorry about the pearls,' she said falteringly.

'You must be,' said Mrs. Egerton suavely. 'They are, of course, irreplaceable. I should think you might be ready

by the three-fifteen. It gets in at five-thirty, I believe. They say they will meet you. Annette's eldest daughter Dora is nineteen. She is engaged, perhaps you remember, to Sir Mark Flitton? Mabel, the youngest, is going into an Anglican Sisterhood. Annette is intensely religious, and, after all, if girls don't want to marry, it's much the most becoming thing they can do, don't you think?'

'I suppose so, if they're really religious,' said Viola, not meeting the fine, shrewd gaze that rested searchingly upon her.

'You must be something,' said her mother a little dryly. 'If you don't know how to play your cards, you had much better learn how to say your prayers. Tell Cèleste to pack your boxes, and I will go out with you at eleven this morning to help you to buy a few country clothes.'

'Am I to stay there for ages and ages?' asked Viola.

'No doubt you will do as you like,' said Mrs. Egerton tranquilly. 'But I should suggest your staying there until you have learned, for instance, that one cannot be a satisfactory member of a household and act against its prejudices. You are of age and can do as you like, of course, but we have, you must remember, the same privilege, and if what you like is too much of a contrast to our preferences, we are not obliged to have you permanently under the same roof.'

'Do you hate me, mother?' Viola asked with a catch in her voice, 'because I can't do what you want?'

Mrs. Egerton reflected for a moment before replying, then she said, 'I think you would find you could do it if you tried. Protection is not a form of hostility.'

'But don't you,' Viola pleaded under her breath, 'love me any more?'

Mrs. Egerton glanced away from her; as far as it was possible for her to love—with every nerve of her angry being—she loved and hated this exasperating, uncertain creature whom she had created and could not control.

'I am not particularly pleased with you, if that is what you mean,' she said without emotion.

It was a truthful answer, for to be pleased is what many people mean by love.

Viola knew she only had to say 'Send for Reggie,' and

the whole household would be at her feet again; all the warmth and tenderness she missed at every turn was waiting on the other side of that hidden spring.

She turned away from her mother with a cold, sick feeling at her heart. If she would only give in, she needn't be chilled and frightened any more, not by outer things—and did inner things matter?

Hortense, her mother's maid, came in with the breakfast tray. She pulled up the delicate, rose-coloured blinds and let the sunshine in. The room shone as it always did, soft and gleaming, with a luxury too fine to betray itself.

Her mother began opening her letters one by one with a small green jade paper-knife. She had turned her attention off Viola as completely as if she had ceased to exist. Mrs. Egerton never had any attention for what she could not govern.

Viola knew that her father was waiting for her downstairs, and that he would mind just as much. It was all very well to believe in freedom, and love people who fought for it, but it was quite another thing to make two very tender and indulgent parents thoroughly angry and unhappy.

Viola could never have opposed her parents at all if it hadn't been for Reggie, but since her engagement to Reggie she had imperceptibly moved a little away from them, and now she couldn't move back.

Mr. Egerton was very angry with her. He minded much more about the pearls than her mother had, and much more about the Labour meeting.

'I can't expect loyalty from my workmen when I don't get it from my own daughter,' he said bitterly.

Viola was overwhelmed with shame; but in the midst of her shame she caught herself thinking, 'Is loyalty having to believe whatever they believe?' And she knew that she would go on being ashamed, but that she never would believe what they did.

CHAPTER XXXVII

TEN years had dealt lightly with Warren Manor. Everything was mellower and a little more fixed.

There were more flowers in the garden and more moss on the red roof of the house, the gleaming paddock between the orchard trees was like a polished jewel.

A bloom as of things perpetually cultivated and cared for rested upon the place.

Mrs. Bligh had changed very little; there was no gray in her thick chestnut hair, her figure was as slim as a girl's, but her face was fuller and her mouth a little more set. Time had left her her grace, but it had blurred the distinctness of her delicate features.

Mr. Bligh looked undeniably older. His optimism had received not so much a shock as a series of undefinable arrests. His mouth drooped pathetically at the corners. He had expected too much from life and from himself, and he had not got what he had expected. He had simply gone on being very comfortable for twenty years, when comfort was not what he cared for most.

The world's radicalism had pushed beyond the cheery optimism of his early faith. There was something fiercer and cruder about it now; it was more liable to take short and violent cuts across the comfortable world.

Mr. Bligh was less sure of the wisdom of youth. His children had not disappointed him, indeed he had every reason to be proud of them. They were well, good-looking, and socially popular. But they didn't seem like his children, they seemed like rather unsympathetic young strangers who knew a great many things about Mr. Bligh which he would rather they hadn't known, whereas he knew nothing at all about them.

Their mother understood them without agreeing with half they said, or ever using their expressive slang. They talked

to her as if she were one of themselves, not as if they were waiting to go on until she had left the room. She was as good a wife as ever, but her silences disconcerted her husband more.

Mr. Bligh used to find himself talking a good deal to the gardener.

Denis had gone into the Navy and hardly ever came back. When he did he went through the house like a gust of wind. His visits were a record of wants.

Mr. Bligh tried to provide Denis with what he wanted, but he soon saw that Denis wanted his father to provide, and not accompany, the objects of his desires. Denis wanted friends of his own age and a great deal of very hard exercise.

He thought his father a queer old sport. Unfortunately, Mr. Bligh could not feel old at all, though he sometimes felt very queer.

He saw more of his daughters, but he knew even less about them. Dora was her mother over again, fastidious, calm and reliable.

Even her engagement, which took everybody, but herself by surprise, did not excite her. She was to be married very soon and Mr. Bligh would never know what she felt about it. It was an even greater shock when his wife told him that dear Mabel had a distinct vocation and was to go into an Anglican Sisterhood in a year's time.

Mabel had more of her father's expressiveness than the other children, and she was so unselfish and considerate that sometimes Mr. Bligh thought she loved him.

He tried to explain to Mabel how old-fashioned monasteries and convents were. He said they were effete survivals, like fossils from the earlier ages. But something stuck in his throat when she said to him a little wistfully, 'But it isn't old-fashioned to love God, daddy, is it?' The other two children always called him Father.

'But must you go into a convent to love God?' he asked helplessly. Even before she answered him he saw that she must.

She answered as gently and diffidently as she always did, but beneath her gentleness her decision was unshakable.

'I feel,' she said, 'as if I couldn't do it as easily anywhere

else. I want to give myself up to it for ever, and not to be interrupted.'

Mr. Bligh said no more; he saw himself as an interruption. For the sake of his wife and children he had given up his ideals, and now his wife and children regarded him as an interruption to their own. This knowledge was at the bottom of his heart where he very seldom looked at it.

He had his pupils and his garden, and he cared more about his food than he used to, but the corners of his mouth turned down.

It was a great relief to Viola to be at Warren Manor. She was surprised to find that nobody blamed her about Reggie. Nobody at Warren Manor ever blamed people for not making loveless marriages, or thought the worse of any one for a mistake, provided that it was not a sin. Mr. Bligh and Mrs. Bligh had always though Mrs. Egerton worldly, and rather liked to see worldliness (wholly unassisted by Godliness) fail.

Dora was staying with the Flittons, and Mabel was always sorry for everybody who felt uncomfortable about anything. They treated Viola as if she were recovering from rather a tiresome illness, and ought to have the best of everything.

No one ever mentioned Reggie or alluded to Jim Barton.

There was no reason why they should refer to Jim; he was buried long ago beneath the weight of Mrs. Bligh's displeasure. But Viola found herself listening for the sound of his name.

This was the very garden where he must have watched, as she did, the riotous late spring passing in swift processions.

This was the lawn, smooth and placid, with its atmosphere of regulated care, where Jim must have learnt his first sharp lessons of civility. She longed to hear, with a wave of pity and tenderness in her heart, the history of his first mistakes. The gulf must have been so wide, and all his young raw strength and ignorance so impotent to cross it.

She looked long into Mrs. Bligh's kind, smiling eyes—these must have saved him. When Mrs. Bligh spoke of her husband's pupils, Viola could hardly hide her eagerness to catch the familiar name. But the anecdotes about the pupils Mrs. Bligh told her had no names.

One soft and sunny morning Viola asked if she might

help Mrs. Bligh pick sweet peas. The sweet peas stood up in long trellised rows on either side of a tiled garden path. They were so high they hid the two women from each other. Pale yellow and mauve, scarlet and the blue of summer skies, flesh pink and deepest violet, the sweet peas made a wall of dancing, tip-tilted colour.

It was like being surprised by an army of butterflies. The garden beyond them was drowsy with the humming of bees among the lavender bushes.

A blackbird gave a long occasional chuckle, fresh as spring water, and loud with hidden glee.

They picked in silence for a few minutes, and then Viola said,—

'Mrs Bligh, do you think I was wrong to break my engagement to Reggie?'

Mrs. Bligh snipped unerringly while she reflected.

'My dear, I know so little about it,' she said gently. 'But I should advise *no* woman to marry unless she is sure of her own heart.'

'You don't think love comes with marriage?' Viola asked.

Mrs. Bligh shook a mauve sweet pea out of her sleeve. She felt a faint sense of irritation, as if she were being asked more than she wanted. Nature itself was richer than she liked this morning—the sun was hotter, the scents of the flowers less vague and fine.

'I believe,' she said cautiously, 'that there are women who really can adapt themselves to comfortable homes by accepting a husband as part of it. But, personally, I cannot understand it. I understand my own dear Mabel very much better.'

'Oh,' said Viola, 'I can't understand Mabel at all—especially not just now. All the world seemed so full of—of what is young. I want to have what is young belong to me.'

Mrs. Bligh made no direct answer. Then she said,—

'Why should you not love—and when you love you will be sure of what you want? You are very young yourself, my dear. I am sure you were right to wait until you were more certain of yourself.'

'Yes,' said Viola with relief, 'I think I'm sure—I think I am sure now.'

Mrs. Bligh moved through the screen of sweet peas and

looked at her in astonishment. Mrs. Egerton had told her nothing yet about Jim Barton. She meant the visit to be a long one, and it occurred to her that an unconscious revelation inspired by Viola's enthusiasm would be even better than one she had privately instigated. Later on she would find out what had happened, and if nothing had happened it could easily be made to. But it would happen with more authority if Viola knew Mrs. Bligh very well first.

'My dear, I didn't know,' Mrs. Bligh said softly. 'Of course if you care for some one else—why then—more than ever you were right to free yourself.'

Viola held her head up proudly, and met her companion's kind, uncurious eyes.

'Yes,' she said, 'there is some one else—but, oh, Mrs. Bligh, it isn't at all easy—I don't even know if it's right!'

Mrs. Bligh put down her basket and put her hand on Viola's arm. 'Let us sit down under the oak tree and talk quietly,' she said tenderly.

This was a confidence in which there could lurk no danger. Viola's eyes turned to hers, were young and hurt, but wholly innocent.

There would be nothing uncomfortable in listening to what Viola had to say; and there was a secret pleasure to Mrs. Bligh in finding that the children of other mothers sought her confidence as well as her own.

Viola sat down in front of her on the grass.

'Why I wonder if its wrong is because he's different,' she explained. 'He's not married or anything dreadful like that. There's no reason why I shouldn't marry him—and he's, oh! wonderfully good—good like you and dear Mabel—he really *cares* for God—as if He lived next door and you *could*!'

Mrs. Bligh laughed gently.

'He lives nearer than next door,' she said, 'and you can! Never mind. I like your good man—I wish there were more of them.'

'And you do think goodness matters more than anything else?' Viola urged. She seemed to be anxious to establish this point, and Mrs. Bligh saw no danger in it.

All her life goodness had mattered to her more than anything else; at least what she had believed was goodness.

'But mother would simply hate it,' Viola went on in a low voice, 'and father and Harry—they'd think it hideous and indecent. I don't believe they'd ever speak to me again.'

'Just because he's poor?' asked Mrs. Bligh incredulously. 'Oh, Viola!'

'It's worse than that,' said Viola bending over a daisy. 'He's not the same as we are. He lives among the poor. Of course he's educated and all that, you know—but still he does *live* there.'

Mrs. Bligh looked over the girl's head into her herbaceous border. Columbines and delphiniums, pansies and forget-me-not—the heavy, sweet heads of pinks, a cascade of spirea and a background of pale pink peonies, rested all her senses. These were her life's greatest pleasures, and her soul held their spiritual counterparts. After a long pause she said gently,—

'Dearest child, I do not think the outer life matters, Ideals are never easy, but they are worth—even one of them—even half carried out—the whole material universe.

'It is a great vocation to give God to those who have nothing else. If you love this man and what his life stands for, I should not think you wrong to oppose your parents. The conscience must act for itself.'

Viola looked at her adoringly; this seemed a person she could trust.

'I think I *do* love him enough,' she said consideringly, 'but I don't honestly care about the life. I could only do it—if I do do it—because he wouldn't be happy any other way.

'I don't share his ideals, and I don't like poor people very much. But on the other hand I like him just as he is, and he wouldn't be just as he is without them.'

Mrs. Bligh murmured an assent. She believed theoretically in the headship of a husband over his wife, that is to say, she believed in the headship of an ideal husband over an ideal wife. It would be a hard school for the child before her, brought up in luxury and spiritual irresponsibility; but Mrs. Bligh, who had been brought up in very much the same way, would not have shrunk from marrying a poor and hard-worked clergyman herself. He might have ended by being a Bishop, but she would have started with him poor. She stroked Viola's head, which was still turned away from her, with sympathy.

'But,' said Viola in a sudden rush, turning her head to face Mrs. Bligh directly, 'he's not what people call a gentleman.'

Mrs. Bligh withdrew her hand. Her sympathy abruptly ceased. Poor curates must be gentlemen.

'And he's worse than that,' Viola went on rapidly. 'He's much more of a Socialist than Mr. Bligh, and he's something or other of the Dockers' Union, and the dockers are daddy's dockers, and they're striking; so, you see, it's really awful!'

It was so awful that Mrs. Bligh completely ceased to see it; in her experience when things were awful beyond a certain point they didn't happen.

'But are you sure, darling,' she said gently, 'that you are in love with this queer person? What has he done to make you so?'

'He hasn't done anything,' said Viola defensively. He's quite plain, really. He ran away when I wanted to make friends with him.

'Oh, Mrs. Bligh, I want you to tell me about him. You know him better than I do—it will help me so much what you say.'

'I know him?' exclaimed Mrs. Bligh. 'My dear Viola—I know nobody——' she checked herself from saying 'Nobody out of my own class'—'Nobody at all astonishing,' she finished tranquilly. 'Perhaps he is some one you have heard my husband mention?'

'No you *both* know him,' said Viola obstinately. 'His name's Jim Barton.'

Mrs. Bligh closed up suddenly like a sea anemone roughly handled. Every line of her delicate face hardened. She sat very still, and though it was a warm, fine day, she felt cold.

'Jim Barton,' she said at last. 'Yes, I do know whom you mean. I'm very sorry—I had no idea you had ever met him.'

'He dined with us,' said Viola in a flat, expressionless voice, 'and I've heard two or three of his addresses.'

'But he isn't in the Church,' said Mrs. Bligh. There was no hiding the disapproval of her voice now. 'He calls himself a Christian, I believe, but he doesn't even pretend to be a churchman.'

'He doesn't pretend anything,' said Viola firmly. 'Why

do you speak as if you didn't like him?' She twisted the arm on which she leaned, so that she sat looking straight into her companion's eyes.

Mrs. Bligh drew her lips together into a strange, unbecoming line. She didn't like Jim Barton because he made her feel as if she were in the wrong. Her conscience flinched at the sound of his name. She told herself sharply that she was not in the wrong—she had reasoned the whole thing out point by point so that there was no room left for remorse—only instinct crept in between her reasonings and shook her. Less than a year after Jim Barton had left them she had learned the truth. Emily had written and told her. Emily had lost her child, and Jim had found her a place. Wivvle had done nothing. Emily told Mrs. Bligh the whole story and referred her to the lawyer for proof.

'I won't tell any one else,' Emily wrote, 'because I should lose my money from Mr. Wivvle, and I wouldn't have told you but I thought Jim Barton minded your misjudging him. He was such a one for those early services.'

Mrs. Bligh had read the letter very carefully. She had prayed over it and kept it near her for a week, then she had destroyed it. She did not believe a word that Emily said.

Emily was immoral and immoral women told lies. She had no need of any further witnesses. Jim himself was the proof. Had he not admitted it to her in that dreadful interview he forced upon her over the Christmas roses? She had never liked Christmas roses since, they had been sullied by Jim's presence. If he was not a sinner why had he demanded so brutally and passionately her uncovenanted mercy? If there had been any other truth would he not have told her? Of course he would have told her—he would have told her because he loved her—well—not loved her in any bad, real sense, but in the proper sublimated way in which Mrs. Bligh liked to be loved. He had wronged this feeling for her, he had wronged his spiritual birth, he wouldn't have looked at her with those agonised eyes if he hadn't; and she would, of course, if he had been innocent, have understood and saved him.

Still, she hadn't told her husband about Emily's letter, nor gone to see the lawyer. She was morally certain that Emily's

new story was not true, but she didn't like to be reminded of it.

Her face grew very stern under Viola's searching eyes.

'I'm afraid,' she said, 'I could only, if I spoke to you about Mr. Barton at all, tell you a very painful story, a story I do not even feel sure I know the rights of; but in any case I am convinced that Mr. Barton is not a person you should marry. I would much rather you asked me no more questions.'

But Viola was twenty years younger than Mrs. Bligh. She belonged to a generation whose sensitiveness is less than its curiosity. She was not ashamed to ask questions when the answers were vital to her happiness.

'I simply must ask you,' she said, 'how could I decide anything unless I know myself what there is against him?'

'But you know already enough things against him, do you not?' asked Mrs. Bligh.

Viola gave her an astonished look. 'I mean *real* things,' she said; 'those things I told you are not real things.'

Mrs. Bligh's delicate eyebrows drew together, but she spoke a shade more gently.

'Is it really necessary,' she asked, 'to discuss these things, if Mr. Barton has not shown any signs of returning your fancy?'

Viola felt an angry wave of colour cover her face. Something stabbed at her heart—it gave her a curious sense of shock, as if Mrs. Bligh wasn't after all an angel, but just an older woman meaning to be unkind to her.

'But,' she stammered, 'I thought you knew—of course he said—he said when he was going away—he cared for me.'

It hurt her like a physical violence to say these words. She bowed her head in her hands after uttering them. Mrs. Bligh said nothing for a long time.

'It is very distasteful to me,' she began at last, 'to discuss such a subject, nor is it a suitable one for a young girl even to know.'

'If I was old enough to marry Reggie,' said Viola doggedly, 'I'm old enough to know why I shouldn't marry Jim.'

Mrs. Bligh drew a deep breath. She felt a curious distaste from putting into words what she believed to be true.

'While Mr. Barton was here,' she said, 'ten years ago, under

my roof, he got an innocent girl into trouble. We had to send her to a sisterhood, and Mr. Barton, we were compelled to dismiss from our house.'

Mrs. Bligh had a perfect right to make this statement, she was not bound to believe Emily's word, and it was obviously her duty to save her cousin's child from disaster. She had also relieved a curious feeling in her own heart, a feeling which, if she had not been so religious a woman, might have been called spite.

But something stopped her from putting out her hand to touch and comfort Viola.

Viola got up slowly and walked aimlessly away towards the orchard. Her head was bent, and the hand that hung by her side was clenched as if she was still holding on to something which she should have let go. Mrs. Bligh followed her for a moment with an uneasy glance.

Neither Dora nor Mabel would have left her like that. They would have cried with their heads in her lap, and they would have let her gently eradicate Jim.

But then she would have been very gentle, and she had not been altogether gentle to this girl who had given her her confidence.

Mrs. Bligh saw Jim's eyes again looking into hers, so watchfully, so generously, with such a passionate desire to serve her, 'the desire of the moth for the star,' the pathetic, useless, blundering moth for the remote and wholly uninvolved star.

She felt again her disgust for his fall, the cold repulsion of her safe virtue for his endangered passion.

She had not blamed herself because her safety had made his passion dangerous to him. She did not know enough to realise that she had shaken his control; but she felt again the cold wave of her anger when she realised that in spite of his feeling for her he was capable of any feeling for Emily. His courage in facing her afterwards had enraged her, and his agony had set the seal upon her anger. He had reproached her with his pain, and though she had judged him tranquilly and finally in spite of it, she had never been able to wipe out that astonished feeling of his reproach. What had he to reproach her for? What had he now? She had done her duty. We know that duty is a very painful process, but

perhaps to people who go through it as often and as circumspectly as Mrs. Bligh, it ceases to be painful.

Mrs. Bligh had examined most of her feelings very thoroughly before she responded to the music of the luncheon gong, but she hadn't examined the first feeling of satisfaction in her heart, which came from her knowing that after her intervention the girl in the orchard probably wouldn't marry Jim.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

VIOLA did not get any farther than the paddock. She only wanted to set a screen between herself and any human eyes.

She sat down under the trees and saw between the green dancing of the leaves a vague, firm line of blue.

The air was alive, as if the pulse of the day beat through it. It was the noon hour, still and full of scent. The drowsy, persistent song of the bees was the only sound she heard. It seemed an ancient sound, older than birds' songs, as old as the silence of the dreaming earth. Her thoughts ran through her mind disconnectedly, like intermittent pain. She watched the light in the trees, and the small, hovering, gold bodies of the bees, between her and the hedge shadows.

Viola's heart was heavy within her, heavy and sick. She was not yet conscious how sharp a blow she had received, because she had not yet had time to connect it with her dreams and watch them die.

All her life long she had hated and avoided ugliness, she would not look at it; she had not needed to look at it, and every one had praised this evasion in her as a virtue.

She had never known badness, and though she lived in a world permeated by hidden irregularities and where innuendo was the spice of wit, she had either not understood it, or she had escaped it by laughter. Laughter was always safe. It was safer than dignity, safer than self-respect. You got away from whatever you didn't like by it, and it didn't make you look like a prig.

But there are situations even in modern life which cannot be met by laughter.

If it had only been Reggie! Viola knew that she could have forgiven Reggie.

Reggie wouldn't really have meant it. His whole character didn't go into his acts. All day long he did things that weren't

a part of him. If he had infidelities they couldn't have reached his heart. They would have been as careless as the clever way he put on his clothes.

But for Jim to do a cruel act and not to let it count was incredible. If Jim had done it, he was not Jim. He was a man like other men, only not nearly so nice. No other man that Viola knew had a sister who was a thief, and spoke with a Cockney accent.

These disadvantages did not make her believe Jim was more likely to be guilty, but if he was guilty, it somehow made it all more irredeemable and squalid.

Her imagination was as shaken and solitary in its world of blossoms and sunshine as Jim's had been long ago, struggling through a snowstorm. Beauty was a bitter taste on her lips.

She put her hand up with a little nervous gesture to shut out the loveliness of the unconscious world.

The earth was made of flowers and light. Buttercups and daisies, wood sorrel and tiny speedwell stood up transfixed and shining in the sunlight. By the hedge the cow parsley spread high its filmy lace. There was nothing to match her desolation, or to make it seem less mocking to take the name of God in vain.

Viola had a very dim idea of God; she had never thought very seriously about an Invisible World, but she liked to see somebody else believe in Him, and she thought, for she was very young, you could not sin and keep the sense of God alive in you.

If Jim had wronged and left a woman, Viola knew he must have wronged and left God.

Nor was she as sure now that he had ever had Him.

She couldn't ask Jim, because if he was that kind of man she wouldn't believe him, and she wouldn't ever know if he was that kind of man or not, unless she could believe in him.

She wished she could have asked Mrs. Bligh more questions, but Mrs. Bligh was like her mother. She knew too much, experience had robbed her doubts of all their benefits. She would dash all Vola's challenging hopes with axioms.

'Men are like that,' she would say. 'God sends us these crosses. Be thankful you have found out in time.'

But Viola wasn't at all thankful. She wasn't sure God did send crosses in the shape of the failure of other people's hearts, and she could not believe that all men had so little honour.

She couldn't speak to Mr. Bligh because he didn't like painful subjects. He dodged them as if they were blows.

She wondered with a queer little flash of self-reproach if people had ever wanted to speak to her of their troubles and hadn't dared because she shrank from pain.

It was the first time she had discovered that fastidiousness could be a weakness and not a strength. She buried her head in the cool grass and wished that she could keep the darkness over her.

She felt unsure of herself. Who was she to steer a course unlike the world around her? To put aside the beliefs and practices of her own people; and where had this presumption led her? Hadn't the inner life failed?

The outer life didn't promise so much, but it didn't fail. Money bought what it set out to buy. You could appreciate possessions at their full value. You weren't robbed of lovely surfaces. But if you pushed all these aside and stood out for what was at the bottom of your heart, you could be more robbed than any bank could rob you.

If the inner life went, everything she had went, except material comfort.

It had been the inner life which made her release herself from Reggie, and read *Ann Veronica,* and cry because she saw two old people sitting on a doorstep in the rain. It had not absorbed much of her time, but it had occasionally pushed its way up and shaken her—it had shaken her most often and most strangely since she had met Jim's formidable eyes.

Was her inner life simply perversity, like a craving for something indigestible to eat?

Then a very strange thought occurred to Viola. Supposing she wasn't Viola Egerton, supposing she was a housemaid—that particular housemaid. Supposing she was what people call 'wronged.' Who would help her most? Where did people like this poor creature turn?

She thought of her mother and Mrs. Bligh, and she found herself trembling. Their way of dealing with the world was

so short and cold. Of course they were good women, so far above temptation that no wind of it had ever shaken them, but they wouldn't be particularly consoling to take sins to.

She thought of Reggie and how he had said, 'I have no patience with failures—I never give a workman two warnings.' She thought of herself, if some one came to her in great trouble, wouldn't she just feel terribly uncomfortable and tell somebody else about it?

Jim wouldn't. Jim would take troubles, his own or somebody else's. Even if Jim had sinned, was it worse than not knowing how to be kind? Was the question really so much what people had done as what their doing had made of them? Of course this was going rather far, but when you are unhappy you do go rather far.

Mrs. Bligh had said she didn't know the rights of the case—but perhaps somebody else did. Perhaps she could find out?

Viola buried her head deeper in the grass. She didn't want to find out. She thought it would be nicer than anything to melt into the earth and forget; not to find out anything, nor to believe anything.

It was curious, but she had never wanted to be without consciousness before. She did not know how unhappy she was, nor that the panic longing to be blotted out is the last stronghold of the nerves before the will frees them into action. When she raised her head she had thought of something to do.

Mrs. Bevan, the Bligh's cook, had been with them for twelve years. She must have known this housemaid—she might know her still.

Viola moved quickly through the paddock and the walled garden to the kitchen door.

Mrs. Bevan had just finished dinner. She stared with a certain severity at the visitor who, without an engagement, had missed a profitable meal.

'Would you take anything to eat on a tray, miss?' she asked without enthusiasm.

'No thank you, Mrs. Bevan,' said Viola quickly. 'I came to ask you a question. Do you know anything about a housemaid who left here ten years ago—a housemaid who was in trouble?'

Mrs. Bevan, whose colour was always high, rapidly purpled. 'I do and I don't,' she said shortly. 'Girls who have married and live respectably with several children and a sober husband shouldn't be asked questions—not to my mind.'

Viola put a small, persuasive hand on Mrs. Bevan's arm. 'I only want to know where she lives,' she said gently. 'I wouldn't hurt or worry her for the world, but there's something I want to see her about, and I thought you might know her name and address? Mrs. Bligh has lost sight of her.'

Mrs. Bevan softened, but she still felt that if she was appealed to she ought also to be confided in. It was difficult, however, to press this point, as the young lady seemed oblivious of it. So she gave Viola, Emily Dunstan's address, and finished up with, 'There's nothing wrong, I hope, to come down sudden upon either of them?'

Viola shook her head, and with that curious air of finality common to the ruling class, she thanked Mrs. Bevan and retreated towards the garage.

Emily Dunstan lived only fourteen miles away. Mr. Bligh had a small car which he drove very badly. He had been amazed at the expertness of Viola and had put the car at her disposal.

She moved without hesitation now, and told no one where she was going.

The sun poured down upon her small, tense figure, the car shot over the broad, white road, which ran like a streak of milk under its wheels.

The flying trees raced by with an unreal air. It was difficult to say where speed began and time ended. The world went by in a flash, but it kept going by for ever.

Emily Dunstan lived at Three Mile End, and a local builder had been let loose upon the country-side. Mrs. Dunstan's small and feverish red house next to the Police Station might have been in London, but it had wall-flowers, a strip of pansies in front of the gate, and a brave show of calceolarias on the window ledges.

Mrs. Dunstan was a tall, good-looking woman; she had a high colour and fine, short-tempered brown eyes.

She did not, to Viola's surprise, look like a person who had ever been in trouble.

She glanced with respect at Viola's motor, dusted a chair for her in a small, prim parlour whose fantastic rigidity was broken by a rocking-horse and a baby's perambulator, and stood in front of her, determined to keep her place.

Viola was less sure of hers. She asked Emily twice if she was Mrs. Dunstan, Mrs. Emily Dunstan? and then seemed hardly to know what she had asked her for.

Emily felt sure that Viola wanted her husband's vote; her car hadn't electioneering ribbons on, but it was only when ladies wanted something out of you that they were nervous. She couldn't give Viola her husband's vote as it was already promised to the Liberal member, who was always wanting something done to his greenhouses. But Emily knew how to speak to ladies, even persuasive ones, when she had to say 'No' to them.

'I'm afraid you will think me dreadfully interfering and even perhaps impertinent,' Viola said at last. 'But I've come to ask you a question, and I have this much right to ask it, Mrs. Dunstan—it matters to me terribly what the answer is!'

'I'm sure, Miss,' said Emily serenely, 'I'd gladly answer you anything you like, though if it's about politics I can't say my head's as clear as my husband's. Men always having more time to read the paper and more language after having read it, than what, if we have a pride in our homes we could afford to spend on it. Of course ladies are different.'

'But, Mrs. Dunstan,' said Viola, 'what I have to ask you hasn't anything to do with politics. It has to do with your former life.'

Emily had ten years and five children between her and the past, but her eyes hardened a little.

'Yes, miss,' she said, with a warning hostility in her voice.

'It's when you were with Mrs. Bligh—I come from there ——' Viola said more quickly. 'I'm their friend, Mrs. Dunstan, but I'm even more the friend of some one they knew—about whom there is a rumour which perhaps you could help me to contradict. I hate to bother you about it—I know for you it is all over and put away for ever—but, Mrs. Dunstan, will you—can you tell me—if it was Jim Barton, in that other life, who did you a great wrong?'

Mrs. Dunstan's face changed curiously. The memory of

that incident was buried, but it was not dead. A softer expression came into her eyes. 'No, Miss,' she said after a pause, 'he didn't ever wrong me. I'd rather not go into particulars, if you don't mind. It's all over now, and the least said soonest mended. But there's one thing you don't forget, when you've been down, and that's being—well, being treated just as if you were like anybody else, stood by, as you might call it. I knew even at the time it was better that the poor little thing should die, and I've nothing to complain of on the part of them I was with—they gave it a funeral, but they said flowers wasn't suitable, and I had no money at the time, of course, of my own. Jim Barton—he'd been asking about me, though he had no call to, I was angry when I heard about it, and I wouldn't see him; but he sent the flowers, a cross made of white lilies and pink and white roses. I can see them now. It was the middle of winter and that cross cost money. And he hadn't anything more to do with the child than you had. There's things women don't forget, you know, Miss, whether they're respectable or not. He found me a good place afterwards, too, but I thought more of them roses than I did of anything else.

'I wrote and told Mrs. Bligh there'd been a mistake made about the child's father, and who it was, for I knew Jim Barton thought the world of her, and I wanted her to know the truth of it, if nobody else did.

'But she didn't answer me—a perfect lady Mrs. Bligh always was, but not much help to you if you wasn't what she expected.

'If you'll excuse me asking, Miss, why do you want to know?'

'Because,' said Viola, 'I'm going to marry Mr. Barton.'

'Reely!' said Emily. She wasn't Mrs. Dunstan now, nor the mother of the dead baby who was forgotten—she was Emily who had lived at Mrs. Bligh's, and she deeply disapproved of a lady, a very obvious lady, marrying Jim Barton.

Viola had not kept her place. She did not even see that Mrs. Dunstand had. Her eyes were full of tears. She got up and took Mrs. Dunstan's slightly reluctant hand in hers.

'Oh,' she said, 'I can't thank you—I wanted so much to know the truth. I think I did really all the time, in my heart,

know it, but not enough. Forgive me if I have hurt you, and remember if you want him to be happy, that I shall try to make him happy, and that you have helped me.'

Mrs. Dunstan withdrew her hand.

'I'm sure I hope you'll both be very happy, Miss,' she said, 'and I'll be much obliged if you'll give my kind remembrances to Mr. Barton when you see him next.'

Emily's eyes held no more memories. She took her visitor to the door and watched her drive off with qualified approval. She was a lovely young lady and she knew how to drive a car, but Emily herself would never have dreamed of marrying Jim Barton.

CHAPTER XXXIX

IT was a relief to Viola when she got back to Warren Manor to find that Mrs. Bligh and Mabel had gone to tea at the Vicarage, and only Mr. Bligh was in the garden.

Viola had never noticed Mr. Bligh before, he had always seemed to her the rather voluble, boring member so often found in an attractive family, who has to be suppressed; and between whom, and the rest of the world the family acts as a shield.

Now she suddenly realised that he was old and tired, and kind—very particularly kind.

He fussed about getting her a comfortable chair, he wanted her to have tea, and cream and cushions, and behind his fussing, even tactfully behind it, was an unspoken sympathy with whatever had caused Viola's absence. He pretended that what he minded was her having missed her lunch, but Viola knew that it was her not having wanted it which really upset him.

She drank her cup of tea in silence, and then she said suddenly, 'Mr. Bligh, I want you to help me.'

Mr. Bligh dropped the sugar tongs on the grass. It was years since any one had wanted him to help them. Help was what, unless it was money, people usually didn't want from Mr. Bligh, and there was nothing he liked giving nearly so much.

'But, my dear child,' he said, 'of course I'll help you—if I can, you know. I don't say I'm Napoleon or Marlborough, or even the last of the Doges, but if I haven't their power or their wisdom, I shall have just as much inclination, probably more; they weren't as far as I remember, helpfully inclined.'

Viola leaned forward, her small, pale face was more alive than Mr. Bligh had ever seen it. She had seemed too passive to him before, like a creature submerged and still, in some

foreign element. But she was not passive now. Her eyes woke and flashed at him, her lips trembled. The picture of her in white with a jade green scarf fluttering about her head and shoulders remained ineffaceably in Mr. Bligh's mind; it was like young spring caught in a storm. Viola looked as if she wanted to shake off the fetters of the world of which she had been so still and unconscious a part; and as if, in order to do it, she wouldn't be still any more.

She told her story simply and plainly. Mr. Bligh could follow it without any other difficulty than that of seeing for the first time that he had made a great mistake.

'But Mr. Bligh,' she finished, 'your wife knew the truth. Emily had told her, and she let me think——' her voice broke, she knew she oughtn't to have told Mr. Bligh, this about his wife. She should have spared Mrs. Bligh, muffled her up in some way, but she couldn't resist the temptation. Mrs. Bligh was too good to be muffled up—she challenged exposure.

But Mr. Bligh did not seem as shocked or surprised as Viola had expected. After all he had been married to Mrs. Bligh for twenty years. He was a devoted and loyal husband, and he believed his wife to be the most superior of women—but she was of that type of superiority which is liable to shuffle out of the rigour of unacceptable facts.

'Yes, yes,' he said tolerantly, 'but I dare say she didn't believe Emily, you know.'

Viola said relentlessly, 'She could have found out. If you don't take the trouble to find out whether a thing is true or not, you ought to believe it.'

'That's one way of looking at it,' agreed Mr. Bligh, 'no doubt. Mind you, I don't say it isn't the more direct way, but very few people take it. They follow their prejudices, you know, and prejudices wriggle. I know that myself. I always try to take a perfectly unbiased line, but I'm not sure that I always know where to lay my hand on it, especially when my feelings come in. Feelings flurry me, you know. They're the deuce, and a delicate, high-minded woman like my wife—well, you can't be sure what she'll lay her hand on in a crisis! She didn't like it, you see, the whole business upset her very much; and Jim didn't make any protest. I dare say he was being very noble and all that, you know, my dear; but

nobility is apt to be misleading. I can't blame Annette, but I blame myself, of course—I blame myself. I might have seen deeper. There are one or two points, now I come to look back on it, that never seemed very convincing. I'm afraid we all of us took the easiest way, except Jim, you know, except Jim. But what is it you want me to do about it now?'

'First,' said Viola, 'I want you to go to the lawyer and satisfy yourself that what Emily says is true. I'm satisfied but I shall have to prove more than my own belief; this story will be used against me, you know, to prevent my seeing Jim Barton again, and I want to feel I can fight it.'

'Fight it?' asked Mr. Bligh deprecatingly, 'but—I don't believe in fighting stories, you know—I don't really—stories accumulate so when you begin to fight them, and other people get dragged in, and it's rather like stones thrown in a riot, you know—somebody bringing back a joint for dinner gets done in, while the leaders of the riot go home to tea. It's all very rough and uncertain. I shouldn't start fighting about Jim.'

'I won't if I can help it,' said Viola, but if they attack me about him I must know what I've got to fight back with—and, Mr. Bligh, I want to see him! I can't at home, and I couldn't go to see him again at Poplar! But could you ask him down here for me? Say that I want particularly to see him—I think he would come.'

'Sure to come,' agreed Mr. Bligh reluctantly, 'there's no doubt of that whatever; but it isn't all perfectly simple, you know, very few things are.

'Young people always imagine that if you arrange for them to meet, nothing else matters.

'But there are other things to be considered. I like Jim Barton, you know; I always did like him. I don't say this story didn't stick in my throat; still, I was prepared to make allowances all round. Emily was a very handsome strap—— I mean youth is youth, you know, and it makes mistakes, and then every one concerned has to come forward and pay for them. But I've followed his career, you know, and I'm very proud of him.

'But all the same, my dear child, he's a man, a man of the people, a hero of the people, if you like—but heroes—well—they aren't heroic all the time, and they are men all

the time, you have to consider that! I think you might make a mistake if you thought of him as a hero—rather a cruel one for him as well as for you.

'If you ask him to come down here, what are you prepared to do with him?'

The colour came into Viola's face, but she met Mr. Bligh's eyes steadily.

'I am prepared to marry him,' she said gravely. 'I think it is what he wants, and I think it is what I do.'

Mr. Bligh looked away from her. His eyes had a curious look in them as if they were reconsidering very distant dreams, looking at them, not as they were once to him, but as, with his riper knowledge, he knew them to have been. He shrank from interfering with the generosity of youth, but he was wondering how far the generosity could carry, and what would happen to Viola, and even more to Jim, if it dropped.

'You are sure,' he said quietly, 'that you are not taking this step because you admired Jim and then misjudged him, and now have for him as well as your former admiration, all the pity and remorse you feel for having—even for a little while—deprived him of his due? Marriage is rather what I should call a readjustment, you know—a watering down here and a pulling together there, and it doesn't do—at least I should hardly think it would do—to have anything extra to readjust.'

'Ah!' Viola said with a little distracted sigh, 'how can I tell till I see him, what there is to readjust?' Beneath her breath she murmured, 'Love is a miracle, isn't it? Love is a miracle.'

Viola wasn't as hard as she wanted to be, she wasn't as up to date, she clung with all the force of her strong, unpractised heart to a dream that can shake the world, but makes on the whole very little difference to most people. Mr. Bligh was not one of these to whom love had come lightly. The ardour and the bloom of it had never died for him, the image which had held it had become indifferent to his worship, but worship does not die because images are not responsive.

'Very well, then,' he said with unexpected decision. 'You shall see him, my dear. I will do as you suggest. I will go and see old Simmons and get him to tell me, as a privileged person, the facts of the case. I fear—I greatly fear—I have

a suspicion who was at the bottom of it, and then I'll write to Jim and ask him down here.'

He paused for a moment, and then said a little apologetically, 'And I think, my dear, we will choose the day of the garden party at Downley.' Mr. Bligh was going to take a very strong and independent line, but he thought the actual incident had better take place while his wife wasn't there.

Viola leaned back in her chair and smiled at him gratefully. She wondered that she could ever have thought him insignificant and tiresome; but Mr. Bligh was still insignificant and tiresome, only Viola was too young to admit that it is very often insignificant and tiresome people who understand most perfectly their duty towards their neighbour.

He hovered in front of her for one more precaution.

'I think,' he said, 'that we had better not mention the subject to my wife. She has such a high moral sense, you know. Of course she'd be relieved, very much relieved about Jim. There is no doubt of that whatever. But on the other hand, if it wasn't Jim—I don't want to press the point—but it must have been somebody, mustn't it? And that might upset her more. Well, well, we needn't go into who it was, of course—most unsuitable, but if she were to come to know of any definite arrangement, you know, to have Jim down here, she might think it her duty to tell your parents, and then there would be—wouldn't there?—the deuce of a row. Not that I entirely take the modern view of parents, disagreeable excrescences eating up the life of their young. I don't think—I really don't think I eat up Denis's life, or Dora's, and certainly not Mabel's; but then I have always allowed a margin, you know—quite a substantial margin. But in your case, I'm sure, I've got the highest respect for your father and mother, you know, but I fancy you're a little pushed as to margin, aren't you? And if Jim were to drop in unexpectedly for lunch or tea, while Annette and Mabel are over at Downley, I don't quite see how anybody is going to be blamed for it. I always gave Jim a general invitation to look upon me as a friend.'

'Dear Mr. Bligh,' Viola murmured gratefully, 'I think that will do beautifully.' Her eyes wavered and laughed across

the lawn at him. 'I don't want to get into a row any more than you do,' she added, 'but of course in the end I shall.'

Mr. Bligh shook his head and sighed sympathetically; she said she was afraid of rows, but she smiled while she said it; she was obviously less afraid of them than he was.

The end of Viola's row would be an open future, but the end of Mr. Bligh's row meant to look once again upon the closed door of the past.

CHAPTER XL

IN the rejuvenating effect of a conspiracy Mr. Bligh consoled himself for the shock of Wivvle's depravity.

On the whole he wasn't as much shocked as he would have been ten years earlier. Wivvle wasn't under his charge any more, and seduction is an aristocratic vice. No one would ever know anything about it.

Mr. Simmons was his own family lawyer, and they moved cautiously around the subject and the documents concerned with it over some excellent port. Mr. Simmons recalled how very good-looking Emily had been, and they talked for some time about the awkwardness of handsome house-maids.

Mr. Bligh wrote a very verbose and cordial letter of invitation to Jim, and Jim wrote back in three words that he would come on the date and at the hour mentioned.

Mrs. Bligh did not mind Viola's staying away from the garden party at Downley. It was her yearly duty, and she took Mabel to it for the last time. Mabel wasn't to go to any more parties.

They went off together dressed in blue and white like the Madonna and the very youngest and most innocent of the St. Catherines.

The communion between mother and daughter was so intense that there were moments when it seemed as if Mrs. Bligh was going into the convent, too—her imagination never left her daughter's side.

It was not easy for Jim to get away from London. Mr. Bligh's letter reached him when he was submerged in the strike. It was as difficult for him to snatch his mind off it as it is for a watcher in the sick room to take notice of the outside world. The work he lived in had the same urgency as illness—hundreds of people were swayed by his presence and fed on his vitality. To leave them for a few hours was to wrench himself away from a need.

He could not guess why Viola wanted him, the thought of her cut across his judgment and left him helpless and afraid. She asked too much of him if she did not ask all he had, and she would never ask that. It did not occur to Jim that she could, in her unimaginable life, be as swayed by him as he was by her. He knew she believed in him and even relied on him, but he was used to this reliance of others on his strength; it was an irrelevant reliance and did not shake his heart, even when it touched it. He did not dream that Viola could like him for himself as women like men.

Jim did not feel any pain at re-visiting Warren Manor. The boy who had left it had passed out of his life. He thought of it indistinctly, without unfriendliness. But when he pushed open the gate and saw the same rush of flowers—the wide, smooth placidness of the green lawns, the rich, contented strength of the old red walls, as of a ripe fruit for ever hanging in a patch of sun, memory shot into his heart, and he almost expected to see Mrs. Bligh behind the tea-table, smiling at him with her serene, protective eyes. He found instead Mr. Bligh, older and less formidable than ever, full of incoherent friendliness and apologetic enthusiasm.

Mr. Bligh did not, of course, touch on anything painful, but his attitude itself was a little painful. He seemed to take it so for granted that he was in the wrong; and Jim had forgotten what the wrong was. He only wanted to enjoy the garden and see Viola.

But when he saw Viola at lunch she seemed incredibly far away. He was struck as he had been long ago, with the innate leisure of prosperous lives.

Nothing critical ever took place at once.

Viola greeted him like a casual acquaintance, and then there was a gong and lunch. Even after lunch Mr. Bligh held him back with port wine which he never drank, and a cigar which he was much too nervous to smoke.

Mr. Bligh was nervous, too; only Viola appeared at all composed, she looked in at the long French window at exactly the time she intended to talk to Jim, and suggested a stroll in the orchard.

Jim joined her without a word. Mr. Bligh watched them a little wistfully. They did not look as happy and lawless

as he liked. They looked as if they dreaded what lay before them. It was not Mr. Bligh's idea of a comfortable flirtation. They walked far apart without looking at each other until they disappeared into the orchard.

There was a pause in the life of the spring. The blossoms were over, and the young leaves hid the promise of the fruit.

Viola's powers of speech were stopped by something trembling within her.

'I haven't found the pearls,' Jim said at last in a constrained voice. 'I'm afraid I shan't now, the police say they have been on her track for a long time. Occasionally she lets me know where she is, but of course she won't now. I'm very sorry.'

Viola sat down with her back to a tree and looked away into the sunlight.

'I don't care in the least about the pearls,' she said slowly, 'and I hope they'll never catch Eliza.'

A separating wall of silence cut them off from each other. Then Jim said as if he were breaking it down stone by stone,—'Well, I'm here—what do you want with me?'

She gave him a quick look and glanced away again. It was strange how with Reggie she had always had to try to make up for what she didn't find in him by his handsome exterior. She had relied on him physically to let her off an innate distate, and to smooth down a curious hostility. But with Jim it was just the opposite. She knew profoundly that he was dear to her, that she revered and longed for his strength and companionship, but she had always to get used to his physical awkwardness, to his heavy features, and his holding himself as if it didn't matter. This didn't make her feel hostile, but it made her want to hide her eyes, and keep him only in her heart. She felt responsible for Jim and for his appearance as she had never felt for Reggie. It was as if he was curiously near her, yet he had never touched her, and Reggie had been her demonstrative lover; but Reggie's demonstrations had never been solidly a part of her imagination, they had happened to her as accidents happen. Her nearness to Jim was as organic as the air she drew into her lungs, and as vital to her.

'I wanted to tell you,' she said, hardly speaking above a whisper, 'that I know all about Emily——'

Jim stared at her without speaking. Then he said—

'Who is Emily?'

It was incredible that he had forgotten! Viola could not imagine how Jim, and even Emily, had recovered from such a blow from destiny.

She thought that tragedies were lifelong and continuous. She did not know that even the heaviest sorrows are rarely continuous. They maim, but their consciousness passes. Emily and Jim had been too busy and too brave to keep any dramatic memories, they had stood what they had to stand; and then gone on without the luxury of a perpetual record.

'Oh, but you must remember,' Viola exclaimed, 'that poor Emily, who was here—you took the blame for what happened to her, and then afterwards you helped her?'

'Oh, yes,' said Jim, 'I remember Emily, of course. She's all right, isn't she?'

Viola waived Emily's present ease aside.

'It's the most dreadful thing I ever heard of,' she said in an awestruck voice, 'and what makes it all even worse is that Mrs. Bligh knew the real truth, and when I asked her about it she let me think it was you!'

To Viola's surprise and horror Jim laughed outright.

'No,' he said, 'not really! 'Pon my soul I shouldn't have thought she'd have dared!

'Religious people do juggle with the Almighty. How she must hate me to let herself tell a lie! Are you certain she knew?' He wasn't even sorry now that Mrs. Bligh hated him.

'Yes, but don't you understand?' said Viola, 'if I hadn't found out, and Mr. Bligh hadn't been a dear, and gone to the lawyer for me, that story could have been used against you?'

Jim stopped laughing.

'They could have used it against me any time these ten years,' he said gravely, 'but they haven't used it.'

'I don't mean the Blighs,' said Viola, 'I mean my parents. Mrs. Bligh may tell them, only I think Mr. Bligh will stop her now.'

Jim whistled.

'D'you mean the strike?' he asked. 'Your father would

have dragged it out, to down me? Yes, he might. I never thought of that.'

'No, I didn't mean the strike,' said Viola under her breath. Jim looked at her. She felt his gaze upon her, searching and tender, but as if he dared not find what he searched for. He waited, saying nothing. 'You don't seem to think,' she said in a trembling voice, 'how I might mind—or why I tried to find out the truth.'

'I suppose,' he said slowly, choosing his words carefully, 'because you are a loyal person and a kind friend. I knew that already—I knew it the first time I saw you. I couldn't get you out of my head, and if you'd been only pretty, I think I could have got you out of it. I can stand a pretty face.'

'It wasn't only that,' said Viola; 'I don't want to be kind.'

The silence between them widened out through the orchard until they could not hear the birds twittering, or the soft, lazy, summer sounds over the open fields. Viola hung dizzily upon the verge of miracle. She held destiny on her lips, for Jim's were sealed. He only looked at her and waited. 'I found out,' she whispered, 'because I had to, Jim—because I loved you——'

She turned her head away to hide the acuteness of life. She dreaded the change between them which she herself had made. But Jim did not stir, he did not touch her or take any advantage of the change.

When he spoke it was very quietly and not as if she had done anything tremendous.

'I should lie if I pretended I wasn't glad,' he said, 'to hear you say a thing like that is like knowing the Kingdom of Heaven's true. But you see, the gladness can't make any difference, can it? I shall just have to bottle it up and sit on it for the rest of my life. I can't act on what you've told me.'

'Oh, but why?' she asked. 'You're not going to say because of those stupid pearls?'

'Well,' said Jim, 'Eliza counts. People who ought to go to prison, and who will go to prison if they're caught, must count, as family connections, you know. But not wholly because of Eliza. If your father had misappropriated trust funds—and, of course, from my perverse point of view he practically *has*—I shouldn't wish you to throw me over. Eliza

dots an "i" but she isn't an "i." I'm that myself, I know. Viola—look at me.'

She raised her eyes obediently, they sank into his and became a part of his being; she no longer saw him as ugly or awkward, or as outside herself.

The barriers between them fell like straws.

'I'm not,' said Jim with a twist of his mouth, 'attractive, not even to you, and I'd have to be rather attractive to carry you off under all your guns, shouldn't I? No—don't be nice to me, it's bad enough without that.

'You don't know how bad, because you're romantic, and romance is like a drop of laudanum to a toothache. You see, I can stand doing without you. All my life I've done without things, not because I was virtuous, but because I hadn't got 'em. Doing without is a habit like any other.

'When I saw you, I knew I'd got to have the edge of it against me always. But it was worth it. I've never been in love before. I've wanted women, but that's natural; any man can stand what his senses do to him.

'I knew I wasn't going to get over what I felt for you. I know now why I'm alive. Being let out of prison is pretty good—I've been let out of prison, but not for stealing pearls. I'll tell you about it some day—it was the first decent thing I did—which got me locked up. But not even getting out of prison was as good to me as seeing you. No—don't touch me.'

But she had touched him. She had put her small, fine hand over his roughened fingers. Jim looked at it and then at her. He thought she was too small and beautiful for love. He couldn't go on talking; his voice died away in a sigh of sheer content.

'But I'm not just something in your mind,' Viola said quietly. 'I'm myself—I'm like any other woman. I think I know everything in all the world now, and I know that there aren't any real barriers between us.'

'You say that,' he murmured, 'but you don't know, how can you? I'm raw to you, my life's hard and ugly, full of rough people, and I'm rough myself. I'm not a mystery, I'm only a lout! Why, if you only knew what I was like when I first came here—I couldn't sit down in a chair or hold a tea-cup, and I didn't understand half any one said to me, even

now I don't always understand your thoughts; I'm trained, I'm educated—but I'm not like you. If you marry me you won't only have to live with a strange man, you'll have to live with a strange man who isn't a gentleman.'

'I don't want you to be anything you aren't,' said Viola firmly. 'I want you to be what you are. I'll take care of the rest.'

'You don't know what the rest is,' said Jim, 'and the Lord knows I don't know how to tell you! What I am is all mixed up, more than most men are. I might not always be able even to *try* to be what you like. I told you I never loved any one before I saw you—but that's not true. I've always had in me something that I loved—I don't know what to call it—but I know it leads me, and it takes me into some damned queer places. I believe it's the love of God. But if you told me it wasn't I should have to go on following it just the same. It's always telling me what I am to do, and half of the time it makes me look all wrong. I can't go by any other rule, and people—even my own people down in Poplar—don't like it. When it suits their book they like it, of course, but it doesn't always suit their book. It doesn't suit my own. How do I know it'll suit yours? You don't please other people if you please God, and you mayn't be pleasing God either—that's the risk, and you can't keep them in separate packets because I've tried—other people is what you've got to learn God out of. You're no good at all if you keep off by yourself, but you're less good still if you try to please people. You've got to be with them and hold on to something outside of them. Why, even you, if you were to see a thing that mattered differently from me—I'd have to let you rip—can you face living with a man who'd let you rip?'

Viola smiled a queer little smile.

'I'll risk the love of God,' she said. 'I don't believe I shall mind it. You see, I shan't have to take the risks most women take in other directions. But, Jim, it's only fair to tell you that though I'm interested, I don't know anything about it. I haven't got the love of God.'

'Ah,' he said, 'you're part of it!'

He bent his head till his lips touched her hand. He could not let it go unless she took it away.

Nothing on earth could release him, his spirit and his body were as bound to her as the sap is to the tree. He tried to drag himself back to the obstacles which had seemed to him invulnerable an hour ago.

'I haven't said anything about your people,' he said. 'But don't think I'm not upset about them—they've loved you, and been good to you. This will be worse to them than if you fell under a train. I feel rather as if I'd pushed you under.'

Viola stood up suddenly with a little gesture of freedom.

'Oh, no, you haven't,' she said. 'If you'd pushed me I wouldn't have gone. I'm tired of being pushed under trains. This time I've jumped on to the line myself.'

Jim looked up at her. The laughter and the joy were struck out of his face.

'Oh, but if the engine's there,' he said, 'you'll get smashed whichever way you look at it.'

He had never been afraid since he had struggled out of his earlier life, and he had never, even in those earlier days, learned the deadliest lesson fear can teach—precaution. But he felt both now. He would rather have left her where she stood, with all his hopes upon her, than let her run the risk her heart was set on. But he could not leave her. He had gone too far; to leave her now would be to forsake her. Love, which is the most dangerous of all human accidents had broken Viola's security.

CHAPTER XLI

THE house was full of anger. A cloud had hung over it ever since Viola's retreat from Reggie, though life had gone on the same, but since her return from Warren Manor it was as if Viola had literally broken up her home.

She hadn't been able to have it out. Her first words had the shattering effect of an explosion; her father couldn't listen to her, his heartiness turned into ejaculatory anger. His face crimsoned, his voice rose, his fist shook. They had to keep saying to him, 'Hush! The servants are coming in.'

Viola couldn't make him sit down quietly and let her explain; it would have been like asking a gale to stop blowing.

Mr. Egerton repudiated reason. He behaved as if Viola were struggling for her life in the surf, and the only sane thing to do was to knock her into unconsciousness, and drag her out by the hair.

Mrs. Egerton was more composed, but she was equally terrible. She shut her eyes and winced when Viola spoke Jim's name, and she looked suddenly old. Viola had never seen her mother cry before, but Mrs. Egerton cried now, pathetically tremulously, as if she couldn't help it, her eyelids were always red.

Viola had loved her better than any one in the world for twenty-one years, and her mother's tears shook her as nothing else could have shaken her. Viola despised their prejudices, and she could easily demolish all their reasons, but she couldn't do anything with the look on their faces. She—their child—was making them old and helpless. They fled like quarries pursued by the fierceness of her will. She had been afraid of their anger, but their anger was nothing when she was face to face with it. It was their pain that pierced her to the heart.

Their trouble drew her parents mysteriously together. They were to be met at any hour talking in dry, accusatory voices. They said the same things over and over again, beating out

the accumulated differences of the years, but without anger. Their anger was concentrated on Viola—they had none of it left for each other. The situation was bewilderingly cruel, like the simple French opera of *Louise.*

Louise had to make her choice between her parents and her lover. Viola had always thought that the whole problem was forced. Surely a compromise was always possible? Louise had thought so, too, but her parents hadn't. Their daughter's choice disintegrated and ruined them—they insisted on being ruined and disintegrated by it, just as Mr. and Mrs. Egerton insisted on being ruined and disintegrated by Viola's choice.

It wasn't Louise who wouldn't come to them when they were ill and dying, it was they who wouldn't be nursed by her unless she gave her lover up. Viola would be just the same to her parents whether she married Jim or Reggie, but they wouldn't see it. It was she they cared for, not Reggie's houses and motors and steam yachts, and yet they behaved as if she was depriving them personally of all Reggie's possessions, as well as becoming a perfectly different person.

They seemed to believe that having failed to convince her themselves she would be more likely to listen to Harry.

When Harry had failed the family was turned on to her. Aunts and uncles who lived in big houses and had sent her silver inkpots and leather prayer books on great occasions, too took advantage of these unsolicited gifts to become flatly intimate with Viola.

They insisted on discussing all her private feelings and telling her that she must have got them from the Egertons or the Mannerings.

It seemed to Viola as if she had no private feeling left, but she saw they could have been private if only they'd been like everybody else's. They had been private when it was a question of Reggie. People had respected then the modesty of her youth; and she was only three months older now, but Jim's commonness untied their tongues. It set loose vulgarities and humiliations. Viola heard things she had never heard before. Base facts in the lives of people she loved and respected were thrust at her like weapons. She was even told that the governess she liked best, who had

one day mysteriously left her, had turned out to be the footman's mistress.

They did not turn her from her purpose, but all their weapons had left wounds. She was sure of nothing now. She was not sure of her love, that great fact receded as if it had nothing to do with incomes (soap, that was one of their arguments), and anger. It went literally out of her head. She fought on all day, but love would have nothing to do with her. It wouldn't be used as a weapon.

They made one mistake. Nothing could be much more horrible than having to hear the things they said—they forgot that.

The disgrace was the sin, and the sin was the disgrace, there was nothing deeper in it. They wanted to tear her heart out by the roots, so that no member of their family should deviate from the normal. But it made her father and mother cry—she couldn't get away from that. It was irrelevant and important and absurd. There was no grandness in the situation, and it couldn't be stopped.

Even if Viola changed her mind, how could she give her parents happiness again? They would always be afraid of what she would do next, and no one could give happiness to suspicious parents out of a starved heart.

The person to whom Viola could still give happines was Jim, and that was why she still held on to him.

She had felt only for a moment how much joy she could give him, but the sense of it had blotted out time. She could not remember what it had felt like now, but she knew that she had felt it, and might feel it again. The wrangle heaved, and broke, and collected itself like rain clouds shepherded by wind, to break out afresh. Everybody was worn out by it and nobody had any fresh ideas. They were reduced to the simple, sodden phrases of repetition.

At the end of three weeks Mr. Egerton announced that he would see Jim.

'If you see him I must see him,' said Viola. She believed now that her parents would not scruple to play tricks upon her. Human beings were not as sacred to them as proper marriages.

The storm broke out afresh. Mr. and Mrs. Egerton realised

now that their only chance was Jim. They had believed Viola to be the weakest link, and they had isolated her in order to attack her; but Viola knew them. They could not take her by surprise. She had the same defences as theirs. Jim might be more vulnerable if he could be kept by himself. Lovers united are never vulnerable; they have alive in them the principle which created the world.

You cannot part lovers unless you separate them.

Mr. and Mrs. Egerton dimly suspected this truth, but they thought they could get out of it somehow—probably by giving in.

Jim saw Mr. Egerton first.

There was no geniality left in Mr. Egerton. He sat in his leather-lined, deep-cushioned library chair, holding himself in hand. His mind was full of Elizabethean images, and resented law.

Jim came in and sat down clumsily. He did not know what to say, nor how to take what was going to be said to him. Half of his conscience was on Mr. Egerton's side. He had nothing but pity for the man before him, and it is very difficult to make points out of an uneasy conscience in the face of pity. Mr. Egerton looked a very great deal older and very red. He did not offer to shake hands with Jim; he held the arms of his chair as if he was having a tooth out. He spoke pompously at first, in a controlled voice, but as the interview went on he raised it.

'I have sent for you,' he said slowly and coldly, 'on a most unpleasant matter. It is difficult for me to express what I feel about it to you in civil terms, though I shall endeavour to be civil.'

Jim interrupted him.

'You needn't be civil,' he said eagerly, 'just say what you mean—I can stand it.' He was anxious to make things as easy for Mr. Egerton as possible. Mr. Egerton glared at him. He did not wish Jim to be able to stand what he had to say to him, and he considered his tone of sympathy a horrible piece of impertinence.

'I propose to say what I mean,' he said stiffly, 'if you will be good enough to allow me to speak without interruption.

'I hear from my daughter that in some clandestine and

irregular manner there have been meetings between you, leading to a most unfortunate attachment.

'You had an invitation to my house, it is true, but I should have thought that such an incident put you under an obligation to us, and was not (as it appears to have been taken by you) an incentive to an unscrupulous pursuit.'

'As far as I am concerned,' said Jim, who began to feel a little more at his ease under the studied insolence of Mr. Egerton's manner, 'there was nothing clandestine in my meetings with your daughter.'

'You prefer to imply,' said Mr. Egerton, 'that my daughter is solely to blame?'

Jim flushed.

'If I saw any blame,' he said, 'I'd take it; but I don't. We aren't living in mediæval times; if your daughter is not a free agent in choosing her friends, the fault lies at your door. She merely violates a consent she ought to be able to take for granted.'

Mr. Egerton held himself together as if it was only by a violent effort he could prevent himself from flying into small pieces. His anger ran in him like a flame.

'In our class of life,' he said with controlled fury, 'we feel ourselves at liberty to deny our daughters the right of associating with bargees who have murdered their fathers.'

'Then you shouldn't have invited me to dinner to meet her,' said Jim inexorably.

Mr. Egerton swallowed his passion as if it was a bad taste.

'I made a mistake,' he said more quietly, 'and it is no doubt free to you to comment on it. I believed you to be a man I could, at any rate, socially, trust. It was inconceivable to me that you should take advantage of my generosity.

'If it had been generosity,' said Jim, fixing his steady, challenging eyes on the angry man before him, 'there might be some sense talking about taking advantage of it. But you know as well as I do that you asked me to dinner not to give me a pleasure but to get a concession out of me; and I didn't come for the pleasure of dining with you either. I came because I wondered if I could square things for the men by a personal discussion with you and Mr. Ainley.

'I got nothing out of the discussion, and you got nothing

out of it either, so we were square about that dinner, weren't we? Let's talk sense.

'I want your daughter and I was a bargee, that's what it comes to, isn't it?

'Well, I *was* a bargee, and I did kill my father, and I worked for nearly a year on one of your docks. But I'm better off now, and I have rather more education than your own son. I admit that it's a facer for you, but, to tell the truth, it's a facer for me as well.

'I didn't mean to marry out of my class—people like you are my natural enemies. You can't want me less than I want you—that's a fact!'

It was not, however, a fact to Mr. Egerton. It was a monstrous and insulting statement. His intellect refused it as a donkey stops dead when expected to cross water.

'I can hardly credit,' he said icily, 'that people should easily believe that their efforts produce no success. If you have any such disinclination as you state, I am at a loss to conceive why I have been subjected to the humiliation of this preposterous project?'

'I'm sorry it's humiliating,' said Jim anxiously; 'I don't want to humiliate you. I only want to stick to facts.

'Of course I wouldn't have told your daughter I loved her, if I could have helped it. But when I saw I couldn't help it and she convinced me she couldn't, there was nothing to be done but lump our prejudices and carry it through.

'After all, there is *one* thing worth risking everybody's feelings for all round, and though I grant you, you've got to be tolerable sure you've got it, it's because we were sure, that I'm here now.'

Mr. Egerton scored his first point. He leaned forward and raised his forefinger impressively.

'My daughter,' he said, 'is twenty-one. I have known her for that amount of time, and you have known her for a few interrupted and excitable hours. Why should you be surer of her than I am?'

'She has been brought up as blind to the life you know as a fortnight-old kitten. Do you wonder that I should shrink from exposing her to it?'

Jim hung his head. After all he knew nothing about ladies, except that they were fragile and fine.

'You say you are educated,' Mr. Egerton went on. 'Have you ever lived with a delicate, fastidious girl out of your own class?'

Jim raised his head. 'I've not lived with any woman,' he said with more confidence; 'I've wanted them, but I've kept clear.'

'You've kept clear as well,' said Mr. Egerton scornfully, 'of all possible knowledge of how to do it.

'Purity, if I understand you to make that claim, has just as much value for a girl like Viola as not knowing how to make up a prescription has for a chemist.'

This point of view was both new and disturbing to Jim. He swallowed nervously and searched the room for assistance. His eyes moved from Mr. Egerton, sophisticated and at ease, very nearly triumphant, to the well-stocked, balanced library. Comfort and knowledge lived together in equal quantities and with neither of them taking up too much room. This was the Egertons' ideal of vice and virtue as well; they liked a convenient relation between them.

'It's odd you feel like that about it,' Jim said at last. 'But I don't suppose she does. I think she'd rather have me straight than not.

'I'm sorry I'm not up to your standard, Mr. Egerton, because it's rough on you, our not getting on. But marriages are often like that. You hardly ever see one that doesn't hurt somebody else. But that can't stop people's choosing, can it?

'Viola's young, but I've been as fair as I know how to her, I haven't let her think my life's an easy one to share.'

'There's only one way of being fair to her,' said Mr. Egerton impressively, 'and that's by never setting eyes on her again.

'She'd get over her feeling for you in six weeks then, and if you don't she'll repent it all her life.'

'I've only your word of that,' said Jim sullenly, 'I should have to have hers.'

'In the nature of things you can't have that,' said Mr. Egerton. 'If you ask her to choose, she'll say she's already made up her mind, but as she doesn't know anything about

your kind of life, I think you'll agree with me that upon this point she hasn't got a mind. She's got a future, that I admit is in your hands, to ruin or to save.'

Jim made no immediate answer. He was going over his hour with Viola in the orchard.

He saw again her wavering eyes, steady and facing his; he felt the power behind them, that as much as any power in him, had bound them together. Was there not wisdom in her innocence?

After all he had nothing worse to reveal to her than an unsoiled heart and a few material hardships.

There was a long silence, then Jim met Mr. Egerton's eyes unflinchingly.

'I'm sorry sir' he said, 'but it's no good. You may be right. I acknowledge I'm letting her take a big risk, but it's not as big as you think, and I'd be doing a worse thing, I feel, to stop her taking it.

'I don't know how to put it quite, but there's something on the other side of the risk which makes it worth taking, even for her.'

Jim got up to go. Mr. Egerton stopped him by a gesture of the hand.

He made his first effort to meet Jim as an equal. He stated what he himself believed to be a fact.

'Look here,' he said, 'you may take my word for it. I'm fifty and I know life. This feeling that you think you have and that you think Viola has, even if you both have it, is not worth a risk. You can marry the man or woman you love and be a great deal worse off than if you hadn't done so. Nine times out of ten even in normal circumstances you make hash of it. Love is no more immortal than a stomach-ache.'

Jim met his eyes in a long, searching look. He saw that he was being faced honestly at last, and he saw why Mr. Egerton was tied down to his money. Nothing else had lasted for him.

'I can't act on any one else's experience,' Jim said slowly. 'I've staked my life and hers on this—I believe what we've got will last.'

Mr. Egerton's hand sunk to his side. He became again

impassive and calculating. He had one more weapon to use, though he had hoped not to use it. And when he spoke again it was with a simulated cordiality.

'I'm prepared to do the handsome thing by you, Barton,' he said, 'and more than that, by the cause you stand for. I see you are an honest man, though blindly mistaken. Perhaps you're not altogether to blame for being mistaken. Wiser men than you have had their head turned by a girl. Financially, of course, Viola is penniless, and if she marries you will remain so. But you care for your views, I know, and in the long run it would mean more to you, wouldn't it, to give your theories a leg up, than have your own way? Well, there are concessions I can make and get the other directors to make, which would, I think, meet even your enlightened views.

'If you give up this mad scheme about Viola, I'll give you my influence and back your scheme for the dockers. I'm prepared to meet you at my lawyers' and have the whole thing out in black and white. Your future, and the future of your cause, will be safe in my hands.'

Jim held his breath. He knew what he could do if he had Mr. Egerton behind him; he had long ago planned out a settled and studied schedule of hours and conditions which would free half the river from its top-heavy burdens. But his scheme was hopeless without revolution. Nothing short of bloodshed or a hand from the top could shake the shackles of the men from below; and here was this hand outstretched —outstretched at the price of his private happines. He could get along without happiness if he won it for his men, but his old suspicion of all employers kept him silent. He turned his eyes away from Mr. Egerton's. What must he resign to gain his help? Jim wasn't to be the only sacrifice. He was to resign Viola, and to resign her without her consent.

In a flash his spirit seized upon the flaw in his enemies' proposition, and for the first time in their interview he was angry.

'You can't mix things up like that,' he said fiercely. 'I wouldn't trust a dog with you now. Why, by Heaven, you're trying to bribe me to sack Viola!'

Mr. Egerton pointed to the door. He was stuttering with

rage. Only the sight and feel of physical violence could have satisfied his outraged senses; and he was an elderly Englishman who respected law. He felt as if his honour had left him—but he did not know that he had taken it away from himself.

CHAPTER XLII

JIM went out of Mr. Egerton's study firm in his rage and his disgust. He felt that it would be right to take Viola away from this place of moral obliquity, where consequences and conveniences swallowed up sin, where a man could be offered a bribe out of the very principles for which his life was given.

But he was not to leave the house in quite so self-justified a frame of mind. A footman met him as he crossed the hall and said that Mrs. Egerton would like to see him. Would he come upstairs?

Viola had not told Jim anything about her mother. She had hoped that a miracle might take place when they met, and miracles take place more easily without preparation.

If only Jim and her mother could like each other!

Anger and violence could force their way into Mr. Egerton's library; tobacco and leather were a suitable background for the rougher qualities of men; but they were incredible in Mrs. Egerton's boudoir.

She possessed probably the best set of Louis Quatorze furniture in London. It was so delicate, so slender, so dim in its soft gold and pale brocades, the tapering of the slender chair legs and the inimitable lightness of the matchless curves, that Jim hardly dared sit down at all. He felt as if he had got by mistake into an old French fan.

Mrs. Egerton sat gracefully erect by the side of a high, slender table. There was nothing on it but a cut glass bowl out of which sprang mauve orchids.

She was dressed in a cloudy gray, her head and neck rose with formidable distinctness from its vague, soft folds. All the ease and lightness of the room and all its tensity of perfect form were matched by her.

She motioned to Jim to sit opposite to her, without speaking.

Her silence forced upon him so strong a sense of his help-

lessness and clumsiness that if he had dared he would have turned and fled.

But he did not dare. He moved among the wand-like furniture in an agony of discomfort. Suppose it should break under him!

Mrs. Egerton fixed her eyes upon him as impersonally as if he was something she was looking at through the windows of a train.

'I suppose,' she said at last, 'that you are Mr. Barton?' She seemed to have some lingering hope that he might be a man come to see about the electric lights.

Jim nodded. His throat was parched and dry, his big hands shook. All the years of his culture and his experience were wiped out, and he was back at Warren Manor again, without any of its protective kindliness to support him.

'You have seen my husband,' Mrs. Egerton went on tranquilly. 'Has he succeeded in convincing you that you have made a great mistake?'

Jim shook his head. He had this conviction now, but Mr. Egerton had not produced it.

'I can only hope,' Mrs. Egerton said, 'that I shall be more successful. Mr. Barton, I am sure you are a good young man and I have heard you are a very sensible one. Frankly, do you not think such an idea as a marriage between yourself and my daughter preposterous?'

'I see it might look so,' Jim faltered, 'if——'

'I know what you are going to say,' Mrs. Egerton interrupted him deftly, as if she were saving him trouble, 'If my unfortunate child had not lost her heart to you. But, Mr. Barton, children—and Viola is only a child—have no fixity of affection. It is barely three months since she told me she had lost her heart to—your employer—Mr. Ainley.'

'He isn't my employer.' Jim flushed and stumbled over the word, which struck him as if he had been a thief stealing silver out of his master's pantry.

'Your former employer,' Mrs. Egerton corrected herself. 'I believe I am right in understanding that you have been a dock labourer?'

Jim bowed his head.

'And before that?' Mrs. Egerton inquired.

'I was at Cambridge,' muttered Jim, but it sounded incredible. Mrs. Egerton waved Cambridge away.

'And you had, I fancy,' she said, 'some other manual calling?'

'I served on a barge,' said Jim.

Mrs. Egerton's eyebrows, which were like Viola's, arched and extraordinarily fine, lifted. She accepted the barge.

'You must have been very young then,' she said consideringly, 'so that perhaps before that——?'

'I was in prison,' said Jim desperately.

'I forget what for?' Mrs. Egerton asked in even tones.

'I killed my father,' said Jim. It sounded much worse like this than when Mr. Egerton had shouted it at him downstairs.

'Ah!' said Mrs. Egerton. She did not say anything more.

Jim had forgotten Viola. He wanted to get up and creep away from that light gold room into the mercy of the dark. A very clear-toned French clock ticked on inexorably.

The door opened softly and Viola came in. She did not trust her parents, she knew their affections were unscrupulous. She had to see Jim with her own eyes. She saw him sitting shamed in the middle of the shining room.

Mrs. Egerton did not move when Viola came in. She merely said, 'Turn on the light, dear.'

There was plenty of light in the room before, but this made it worse. It was delicate, shaded light, but it penetrated and showed up everything. It showed up Jim's shame.

Viola did not look like a reinforcement. She came in very quietly without a greeting, and sat on the other side of her mother. She looked across at Jim as if she were judging him.

'I have no doubt,' said Mrs. Egerton gently, 'that my husband has dealt with what he considers your unsuitability for Viola. I am sure you will not be surprised that this has occurred to us?'

'No,' said Jim, suddenly lifting up his head and looking desperately from one to the other. 'I—I see it.'

'Naturally,' agreed Mrs. Egerton smoothly. 'Being a sensible man, Mr. Barton, you would see it, though from our point of view, hardly sufficiently strongly. But perhaps it

has not occurred to you that the other side of the situation is equally unfortunate. Viola is just as little suited to you.' She paused a moment. Viola turned towards her mother with a little movement of entreaty, but her mother ignored it. She had not once looked at her daughter since she came into the room. 'I do not know,' Mrs. Egerton continued, 'if you feel perfectly at home here. I should hardly suppose it; but even if you assured me that it was true, I am convinced that in your surroundings and with what I imagine to be the circumstances and connections of your life, Viola could not be at home.'

'Oh! mother!' murmured Viola.

'My dear child,' said Mrs. Egerton firmly, 'I cannot pay Mr. Barton a higher compliment than by stating facts to him, and what I have just said *is* a fact.'

Neither of them disputed it. All that they felt in their hearts seemed trivial and childish confronted by their incompatibility of life.

'I imagine,' Mrs. Egerton continued after a pause, 'that you are really interested in the religious life? My daughter is not at all interested in it. She has always disliked going to church, and I do not know if she has what is usually called faith! Have you, darling?'

Viola made a helpless gesture with her hands.

'I don't know what I believe,' she said in a low voice.

'Is not that,' inquired Mrs. Egerton, 'what they call being an agnostic? It hardly appears to be a sufficiently complete creed for a clergyman's wife. I doubt, Mr. Barton, if the emotion which has drawn you together is founded on anything at all permanent. Your affection for each other does not seem to me merely unsuitable, but quite ephemeral.

'You are a man of integrity; you will not, I feel sure, insist on drawing a young girl with a slight romantic attachment to you, into the obligation of a lifetime?'

'I shall not insist,' said Jim. He lifted his haggard face from one to the other.

Viola was changed. She did not look like the same person she had been in the orchard. She was white and quiet and as utterly composed as if they had been discussing ear-rings. All the life she had, she hid.

She belonged to that room where everything was pale and slender and had never been roughly handled.

Suddenly she lifted her bent head and looked across at him.

'Before Mr. Barton comes to any decision,' she said, 'I wish to speak to him alone.'

'My dear child,' said her mother, 'don't you think you are going rather far? Farther, perhaps, than Mr. Barton wants? Can you not perfectly say anything you may have to say to him in my presence?'

'No,' said Viola. The two women looked at each other. Their sheathed wills met and crossed. If Mrs. Egerton had conquered Viola before, she would have conquered her finally now; but what had been unsubdued in Viola at Eastbourne had grown stronger.

Mrs. Egerton hesitated and yielded. She dared not press the point. She rose gracefully and said, 'I will give you five minutes, then, Viola—no more.' It was a retreat, but she made a concession of it.

Viola sat still and rigid until the door closed softly behind her mother. Even for a moment after she neither moved nor spoke. Then she said quickly, almost roughly,—

'Are you going to let me go?'

Jim was by her side in an instant.

'Whatever I do,' he said between his teeth, 'is utterly unfair!'

'Which do you owe most to?' she asked fiercely, 'them or me? Do you like their way of thinking? I don't only want you—I want to get away! I never shall if you don't take me!' She spoke quickly, breathlessly, like a creature leaving covert and fleeing, before her hunters.

'That isn't enough,' said Jim despairingly; 'nothing is enough—except love! And I must be *sure* if you have it! I can't take you if I'm not sure.'

She drew back a little before his burning eyes. They rested on her stubbornly with a dumb passion that was all the more intense from his physical control.

'If I prove it to you—will you believe me?' she asked. 'Will you take me then?'

'Oh, my dear!' he groaned, 'will I take you!' He turned away from her, back to the terrible lightness of the room.

'If there is any God at all,' she cried under her breath, 'He'll send me some chance to show you. I'm not all light and brittle—that when I care—I care utterly so that all the other things don't count—don't matter—don't even—exist! But, oh, Jim! If you believe in prayer, pray that this chance will come soon!'

He turned quickly back to her, and as she stood there with her hands outstretched the door opened quietly and Mrs. Egerton came in. She moved slowly across the wide, polished floor and resumed her seat by the mauve orchids as if nothing unusual could possibly have been about to take place.

'Will you ring for tea, dear?' she said to Viola, 'and, Mr. Barton, perhaps you will be kind enough to tell me what decision you have arrived at?'

'I can't say I'll give her up,' Jim said hoarsely, 'unless she wants it, but I'll wait. I'll wait to make sure if she does want it. I know what you say is true. It seems all wrong somehow. We're too different. I ought never to have come here, but you see I have.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Egerton, looking over the top of his head and acknowledging the entrance of the footman.

'Tea, John, please.

'Yes, it has been extremely unfortunate, has it not? You will not be able to stay for tea, I'm afraid?'

'I quite understand, and under the circumstances you will, I feel sure, agree to keep the engagement, if we must call it an engagement, purely nominal? I must ask you not to communicate with Viola in any way. Otherwise you would not be giving absence a fair trial. Shall we say for a year?'

Viola gave a long, low sigh.

Jim hesitated.

'I'll promise,' he said, 'not to seek an interview with her, nor to write to her, for a year. If anything unforeseen happens meanwhile or we meet unexpectedly—I couldn't promise not to take advantage of it. But I'll take no steps whatever to bring such a meeting about.'

'And you, Viola?' asked Mrs. Egerton.

'I agree to what Jim has agreed to,' said Viola. 'I should

have liked a less restricted promise,' said Mrs. Egerton, 'but you will be the more on your honour to keep your own restrictions. We will not detain you, Mr. Barton.'

Jim's eyes rested on Viola as if he were taking her image forcibly out of a frame to keep it in his bare heart for ever.

He was as famished for her as a blind man for light.

He knew she did not know the piercing of the sword of love, her hand rested upon its hilt, but it had never been drawn and turned aganist her heart. He did not know that love has other penetrations, slower but no less sharp than swords.

Viola lifted her eyes to him again, but they held no message; they were wide and vacant, her heart was veiled before his search.

CHAPTER XVIII

THERE is no surer method of remembrance than to associate a man with a cause. Viola might have forgotten Jim if she had not absorbed herself in his aims. He had hardly left the house when she set herself to learn what he stood for. She subscribed to a Labour paper. She went to the London library and drew out of it Karl Marx, Jaurès, and Rolland. She heard Bernard Shaw lecture. She talked for hours to some one who knew Keir Hardie. She became conscious of Jim's world in a new sense. She had always known of it dimly as she had known of the movements and habits of goldfish in a bowl. Jokes in *Punch* illuminated it and funny books about the conversations of char-women brought it before her eyes. But she had not known that this world had its own system of thought as she had hers, and that Socialists were not people who only wanted to take away all that other people had. She learned with surprise that there were other ideas of government; Syndicalist, Guild Socialists, and Anarchists confronted her with drastic changes.

She tried to talk sometimes about her discoveries, but people either laughed at her or turned mysteriously and suddenly angry.

Even people she had always respected as leaders of thought couldn't bear to be asked about ideas which they hadn't entertained.

She learned that what would disagree with your ordinary life, if you believed it, was a crank. Christianity was a crank, but not if it was diluted and restrained. Anything which could affect law, food, clothes or pleasure was anathema. It must not be alluded to except as a joke.

Her own life had swung back into its accustomed grooves from the moment Viola had let Jim go. Nobody seemed to think love could survive a year of silence. They were all extraordinarily nice to Viola, it reminded her of the time when

her tonsils had been removed and she had been presented with a doll's house. Her father went to Norway to fish and she and her mother started on a round of summer visits.

The dock strike came to an end. The end that her father and Reggie had spoken of as the Ruin of England. The Government commission found for the dockers on the majority of their grievances, and let the employers down as easily as they could on the rest.

It looked as if it was the other way round in the papers. But the dockers went back to work, and England, relieved of an inconvenience, continued placidly on her path to ruin. Even Mr. Egerton and Reggie though they had been inconvenienced a great deal more than England, went on much the same as usual.

The Labour papers were triumphant, but as nobody that Viola knew ever read them, they merely gave her a peculiar sense of looking at things out of the Tower of Babel with the added disadvantage of being the only person to understand the difference of tongues.

The enormous unfairness of what her own people thought blinded her to the equal unfairness of what Jim's people thought. She had been too cramped by the fetters of her own class not to imagine that the class she hadn't tried had no fetters.

She longed to plunge into it and be free, but she changed her clothes three times a day and played golf and tennis; and in the evenings she danced the tango. She danced beautifully and seriously, and had, in the course of the dances, in spite of trying hard to avoid them, three more proposals.

In the late autumn they went abroad. Mrs. Egerton believed that railway trains and orange trees would cure Viola.

She gave Viola a great deal of freedom and encouraged her to flirt with a handsome and extremely fast young Frenchman. Viola for the first and last time in her life really flirted. She felt curiously safe and very powerful. Nobody could have been more unlike Jim than Monsier Gustave de René. Flirtation is a curious and thrilling game, and Monsieur de René played it extraordinarily well. It was a flat surprise to the young Frenchman when Viola suddenly and for no apparent reason snapped the flirtation off. He brooded over

it for twenty-four hours, and then left the hotel, leaving his address behind him. But Viola did not miss him at all. She missed Jim suddenly a great deal more, and she missed him differently.

She was sure that she was wasting her life, and life had stopped being easy to waste.

She wanted to be alone so that she could think of Jim uninterruptedly. Meals and gay halls full of people and perpetual dance music tired and confused her.

She would escape by herself into distant olive gardens, and look through smoke-like puffs of olives, down into the sea. Its unshared beauty hurt her. She thought of what Gustave had said to her when she laughingly told him to love the flowers on her knee. 'If you let me kiss you,' he had said, 'I shall love them—I shall love everthing so much more, even the dead fishes on the beach.' She had not let him kiss her, but she had realised that what he had said was true.

Without Jim's kiss she could not love the sea.

They went home to London in March.

The tango had swept bridge aside. Harry was an adept at it. He thought of nothing else. The golden room at Ciro's was his universe.

'I must take Viola there,' he said to his mother. 'It'll knock the nonsense out of her head.'

Viola listened to Harry's offer with a peculiar look in her eyes. She said, 'Are there a good many people there, and can you slip in and out easily if you're bored?'

'All London's there,' said Harry, 'and unless you go all the time, like I do, you'd not miss even a peach of a girl, there's so many—no one notices outsiders.'

Viola nodded, considering. 'I don't mind going with you to-morrow night,' she said indifferently.

When Harry left her, she took out a strange, scrawled piece of paper some one unknown to her had slipped into her hand as she was going up the steps of her house the day before: it ran, 'Can you be where I can speak to you alone, with no one knowing, to-morrow night. It is absolutely urgent.—Eliza.'

Eliza gave her a number of a box at a neighbouring post office for an answer.

It was not very easy in Viola's usual life to arrange for secret hours. But Ciro's sounded secret enough; and perhaps after all this was a last hour, an hour to break up once and for all her usual life.

She dressed with infinite care for her new adventure, she felt like a priestess about to become a sacrifice.

She wanted to be a sacrifice, but she wanted to be as fine a one as she could.

She wore a primrose-coloured dress with a purple cloak, and from her throat to her waist hung a chain of uncut amethysts.

Beauty flowered in her; her eyes had in them the dream which is its own fulfilment.

She held her grave, dark head high. There was a curious half-smile on her lips. She wanted to see to the end of the life she was part of to-night, for she might never see any of it again.

She wanted to look her best, to dance her lightest, and then to hear midnight strike like Cinderella and fly off without leaving so much as a glass slipper behind.

Harry had chosen a well-placed table where they could see the whole room. The light quivered on it like moonlight over a field of flowers.

Each table seemed shut off in a brilliant life of its own, melting suddenly into music.

Movement stirred behind the dancers like a magic wind pressing them into action.

They sprang up lightly from their seats as if shaken into the room, dizzy with pleasure and money. The most expensive passions in the world were there, and the souls through which the passions rode their incontinuous cheap way. The trivial, undermining music forced its excitement into the blood.

Harry caught her hand, and her feet moved of themselves.

She danced and danced, but her mind never swerved from Eliza's letter.

Moment by moment the crisis that awaited her came nearer, and she belonged to it, to its compulsion, and its reality, not to these men whose hands in turn were on her shoulders, whom she moved with her eyes and swung from in her laughter.

These thing were as hollow to her as bubbles in wine, the intoxication lay beneath the bubbles.

Suddenly she saw Reggie and was shaken half out of her dream. He asked her to dance. She hesitated, and while she hesitated Harry said, 'Of course she will, old chap,' and left her.

All the most thrilling memories of their old relationship had been while they were dancing. Reggie was at his best dancing—pliant, skilful, beautiful as all young forceful creatures in motion are beautiful. Viola had felt nearest to surrender when she had been bound to him by music and rhythm. She shut her eyes and tried to feel it again. This was the old life on trial for the last time. If it could enchant her, let it enchant her! She would be safe then from the compulsion of the unknown which called to her.

Reggie's eyes were on her face. He had summoned all his magnetism, and the strength and torment of his passion for her, to force her into sharing his emotion, and she could not even feel moved.

The lights and the mad, bad lilting tune, the swinging, self-created movements, half surrender and half power, had lost their meaning.

Something was dead in her. It had not died in a moment. She did not know what had killed it, but it was dead now. An excitement more real than itself had swept it aside.

She lifted her eyes to Reggie's absorbed, pleading face, and infinitely gently, with half a smile and half a sigh, she shook her head.

It was all over—he would not ask her again. The life it meant, and that he had shared, had slipped out of her hands. Reggie knew it was over. He muttered something beneath his breath and stopped dancing. The music ran on interminably. Harry had disappeared.

She moved quickly away, slipped behind tables and between flying couples, into the cloak room, and through the hall. She was in the street now, and feeling the sane, cold, March air on her face.

As she stood for a moment looking up and down the road for her car, she was conscious that a slight, uncertain figure had slipped up to her and stood beside her. She turned her

head sharply, half expecting to find that Reggie had followed her. But it was not Reggie.

It was a very small, white face with haunted eyes, a voice so small it hardly reached her ears, said, 'If you don't take me with you, I'm done in.'

In a flash Viola knew, and accepted this turning point of her life.

The car swept up to the kerb; Viola put her hand out dizzily.

'Yes,' she said under her breath, 'yes—get in quickly——'

Eliza needed no second invitation. She was in the car as swiftly as a flame licks the side of a hole. Viola sank beside her stupefied. It was Eliza who put sixpence into the messenger boy's hand, and said, 'Home, please,' with a perfect imitation of Viola's accent to the footman.

The car moved off discreet and silent, and then Eliza sank into the corner, doubled up and panting, her bright, black eyes were darkened and wide with fear, she drew her breath unevenly as if she were running. Her face was white, with purple pockets under her eyes. Her hand and her lips moved without ceasing, as if they had a consciousness of their own.

It was terrible to see her eyes, for though they were afraid they were fierce. They were like the eyes of something cornered, determined to strike.

'God,' she whispered, 'that was a year ago. If you hadn't come out just then nothing could have saved me. I'd been waiting for you, I watched you go in. It was my only chance.'

'Chance!' whispered Viola. 'Are—is anybody after you?'

'After me?' Eliza laughed; 'the whole Yard's after me! And who set them after me, d'you suppose?' She leaned forward suddenly and from her white, quivering lips poured forth such a string of blistering and evil words that Viola sank back, sick and faint, shuddering away from her. It was Jim Eliza was cursing, Jim and another man she called Bert. Jim—for if he had not described her exact appearance no one would have known who to look for. But Bert had given her away. They'd copped Bert, and Bert had blabbed—the only man Eliza had ever worked with who'd let her down. 'I'll do for Bert,' said Eliza with quiet intensity, 'when he gets out.'

Bert had given away all her haunts and hiding-places. For

twenty-four hours she had been hunted, slipping away from one to the other only to find fresh men out after her. She couldn't stop to eat; she'd been going down to the river unless Viola stopped for her at Ciro's.

'The river's a lot of use,' she explained parenthetically, 'if you know your way on to a barge.' Then she pulled herself up abruptly. 'How do I know you'll help me to get off?' she asked abruptly.

Eliza fixed her eyes on Viola. They seemed to strip her of the purple velvet cloak, and the primrose dress, to take away from her even her flesh and blood, and point straight at her heart.

Eliza had never taken human life, but if she had, she would have looked as she did at that moment. Viola had never seen any one look wicked or dangerous before—it surprised her very much, but it did not frighten her.

'How can I help you?' she asked.

'Well, I don't know yet myself,' agreed Eliza, 'and that's a fact. I must have some food before I can think. I'm nearly dead for food. I had plenty of money on me but I didn't like to stop. Take me into your house, I'll be safe there, and give me something to eat. Then I'll see what to do next.'

Viola wondered afterwards why she should have acted so instinctively upon Eliza's need. It never occurred to her to call John and send for the police, it never even occurred to her to wait till they reached her door and then let Eliza shift for herself. She acted automatically, as if she too were hunted.

Mr. and Mrs. Egerton were out. She took Eliza into the dining-room where there were sandwiches and soup waiting on a spirit lamp. Eliza cleared the entire plate of sandwiches while Viola was preparing the soup for her.

When she had finished drinking the soup, Eliza sat silent and huddled in an arm-chair. It was one o'clock and snow had begun to fall.

Eliza's clothes looked as if she had slept in them all night, her hair hung loose about her face, she was tired and angry, but she still had her wits about her.

'Can you drive a car?' she asked sharply.

Viola nodded.

'Can you get hold of one to-night?'

Viola thought for a moment.

'Yes,' she said, 'if I go at once before the men shut up the garage. I could get Harry's racer. But we must be quick, he'll miss me at Ciro's and come back here to look for me.'

'Well, cut along,' said Eliza. 'I'll hide in here if he comes, and meet you outside directly you hoot. I haven't any more breath for running.'

Viola left her. Whatever Jim thought, she must get Eliza away. If Eliza wasn't safe, Jim wasn't. It was very terrible, and something—Viola didn't quite know what—about Eliza was more terrible still. But she must do it. She flew round the corner to the garage—it was very cold and she only had satin slippers on, but she had never had compulsion at her heels before.

The men were putting away the big car. They were astonished at her wanting Mr. Harry's racer at that hour of the night, but they took it out for her. She gave an explanation they couldn't catch and turned it swiftly into the Square.

Eliza stood by the lamp-post waiting. She had found two fur coats which hung over her arm. She swung herself into the still moving car. A taxi was driving towards them. Viola leaned forward and caught a glimpse of Harry's astonished face.

'By Jove!' he cried, 'my car!' But they were gone in a flash into the cross lights, and out into the darkness.

Eliza said nothing for a few moments, then she cried, 'Do you know the Folkestone Road? We've got to get there to-night. That's why I had to have a car. All the stations are watched. The boats, too, but they won't trace me coming up in your car with proper clothes on. I bought my ticket. Lucky you could drive—I can't.'

Viola drove on in silence. She needed all her wits for the night drive. They pulled out from the traffic at last, and she could let the car out over the empty roads. From time to time, between endless unwound ribbons of speed, she pulled up to make sure of her way. Eliza never spoke, she slept. All her will and her strength were lost in physical exhaustion,

she flung her life into Viola's hands and left it there. It struck Viola that there was something grand in this act of reckless confidence.

Risk was the essence of the life beside her. But as Viola thought, she realised that it was courage, not confidence. Eliza did not run risks because she had confidence. She had no confidence whatever. She ran risks because she had no alternative.

It was a curious drive. Viola had never in her life had to decide so many things before. Eliza was ignorant of motors and the road. Everything depended upon Viola. The darkness of the night was full of danger. There was the occasional night traffic; once Viola almost ran over a drunken man, and once she came up short against the mystery of a strayed cow, bulking enormous against a hedge of shadows.

The wind and snow hit her cheeks and whipped her searching eyes. Her head ached violently and felt empty. Once for miles she chased a hare between the head lights. It seemed incapable of getting out of the way. Again and again the car was all but on it. It ran like the wind, but could not seem able to swerve into safety. On all sides of it were safety, but it was bound to danger, just as the creature she was trying to save seemed bound to danger. At length with a queer, shrill scream it leapt at the opening of a gate and was gone, and when it had gone Viola found that the tears were running down her cheeks.

Once she went almost to sleep on a long, even stretch of road, and thought she was dancing at Ciro's only that Ciro's was a ship in a storm and all the tables rocked.

She was faint with fatigue when a breath from the sea met her. She felt her slack muscles tighten and breathed deep breaths. The lights of Folkestone were sprinkled up and down between Shorncliffe and the sea.

Eliza woke with a start.

'We want the early boat,' she said. 'We can't wait in the town. Haul up somewhere on the cliff. Hotels wouldn't take us in this time of night.'

The darkness grew curiously vague. There was no light in the sky, but the night seemed like a fabric worn thin and penetrable.

Viola knew that the dawn was near. She pulled up by the side of the road and watched the retreat of night. The horizon moved back slowly. It grew colder annd colder, as if the cold were a gray substance pushing away the vaguer kindliness of the dark. It was gray everywhere now, only the telgraph poles were black, and far away Viola saw the startling black shadows of the ships.

The sea came first, and then the sky over it, and at last the little, shivering, clumsy town.

'Now we'll push on,' said Eliza. Eliza had been tidying up in a curiously complete and detached way. She wore one of Mrs. Egerton's fur coats, and had bound a purple scarf of Viola's carefully round her head with such skill that it looked like a motoring turban. 'We'll have to do now,' said Eliza, covering Viola carefully with the rug, and pulling the second fur coat over all traces of her evening dress. 'Drive straight to the gates.'

The town was just awake; milk carts and newsboys passed them.

The car climbed the hill and slipped down it into the narrow streets, and out on to the open space before the Pavilion Hotel.

'Slow up and leave the car here,' said Eliza. 'Have you any money on you! I'd be glad of all you got.' But Viola had no money.

Eliza thought covetously of the amethysts, but something at the bottom of her indurated conscience struck at asking for Viola's amethysts.

'I've got enough to see me to Paris,' she said grudingly. She looked at Viola curiously for a moment.

'Well,' she said, 'I don't know why, I'm sure; but you've done me a good turn.'

Viola felt her lips trembling and the tears coming into her eyes. Eliza did not offer to shake hands with her. She walked towards the boat with decision and confidence. Viola watched her with her heart in her throat. It seemed all right. It must be all right.

At the gangway there was one sailor and two men who appeared to be just stepping on to the gang-plank, but they had stopped to speak to each other. There was no one else about. Every one was on board; they had only driven up

at the last moment. The two men went on speaking. Eliza came up to them and then stopped dead. She stood quite still like something that will never move again. One of the men stepped forward. He fastened something on Eliza's hands that clicked and flashed, and the other man turned abruptly away from the boat, and Viola saw that he was Jim.

She hadn't saved him, she hadn't saved Eliza.

The sailor stepped aside and the gang-plank was pulled up.

It had begun to rain, the light scurry of a passing squall. The waves ran high and danced with white tops playfully.

The sun caught the sea beyond and made purple and silver stripes on it. The cliffs stood hard and very white, with raw edges, leaning away from the sky.

All the three figures fifty yards away from Viola looked small and stiff. They did not seem to be ever going to move. Jim was explaining something to the other man, and the other man nodded soothingly. At last they approached Viola.

'Yes, yes,' the other man said, 'I'll get her a taxi.' He turned to Eliza. 'You stay quiet, my girl,' he said very much less soothingly. Eliza stayed extremely quiet. The steamer moved off with a shrill shriek of departure.

Eliza wet her lips and looked at Jim with a long, furtive look. 'I'll do you in for this, my lad,' she said. 'You dirty hound; why couldn't you have kept quiet and let me be! It'll be as bad for you as for me, thank God! I'll break you and your reputation till you won't know the difference between the Lord's Prayer and a cat o' nine tails!'

'Steady, miss,' said the detective, coming back with a taxi. 'The less you talk your head off the better it'll be for you. As a matter of fact this gentleman didn't help us to cop you. He came down here because we'd had you followed, and he wanted to make things pleasant all round, see! He's paying for your taxi.'

Eliza lifted her white lids and said something which turned the inspector a dull purple. Jim put out his hand to touch her; he had looked at her all the time, but he could not speak. He did not know what to say.

He had half betrayed her, and that he loved and pitied her made nothing any better for either of them. You couldn't give people away and preach at them afterwards. Jim won-

dered dumbly if Eliza could feel through his silence, his passionate desire to help her. But Eliza did not feel emotions of this kind unless they could be of a practical use to her. She moved out of reach of his hand and said to Viola,—

'I want to speak to you alone without these two men.'

'You can't,' said the Inspector quickly; 'you've got this young lady into trouble enough already.'

'You hop into the taxi,' he said to Eliza. Eliza obeyed him, and Viola moved quickly after her. Eliza saw that Jim and the detective were out of earshot before she spoke. Then she said,—

'Put your hand in my pocket, beneath my skirt, and you'll find your pearls. It'll keep you out of the case if you take them now. They're a couple short, but you can spare two.'

'Oh—I'm so sorry——' said Viola. Her voice broke. Eliza stared indifferently out of the window. She had nothing more to say.

Viola slipped the pearls into her bag. As she stepped back the Inspector tapped her on the shoulder.

'I'm sorry, Miss,' she said, 'but I must take over what she gave you.'

'Oh, but not my own pearls!' protested Viola. The inspector looked into the bag, picked out the string of pearls, and laughed.

'That was very neat of her,' he said. 'It'll give her less time, and they're six short. However, if you wish to overlook it, there are plenty of other accounts to settle. You'd better let me take her alone. The gentleman here'll look after you, Miss. You've got yourself into a pretty pickle, but we can look into all that later.'

Jim crossed over and spoke to Eliza. Viola could not hear what he said, but whatever it was, her white, shut face never changed under it.

Eliza drove off relentlessly without looking at either of them.

'Oh, Jim,' said Viola. He slipped his arm around her and led her back, without speaking, to Harry's little racing car.

She leaned against the side of it and began to cry. Jim seemed struck dumb. Eliza had always had the power of

drying up in him the springs of spiritual adventure. She forced him back into the acid silences of fact.

He took Viola to a hotel and ordered coffee.

'I didn't give her away,' he said, half to himself. 'They rang me up and said they were watching her outside Ciro's, and then that she'd gone off in a private car on to the Folkestone Road. They said she'd be sure to try to catch the early boat, and if I went by train with Mulet we could get here before the boat started. I didn't dream it was you. They'd shadowed her for days. I didn't know, and if I'd known I couldn't have helped—I couldn't have tried to get her off.'

'Oughtn't I to have tried?' asked Viola.

Jim sank his head in his hands.

'How do I know?' he said at last. 'I've always been all wrong about Eliza—long ago I might have helped her—but I couldn't help her. She never cared. You can't help people who don't care. They never get away from anything.'

'Oh, Jim,' she said, 'but you couldn't *want* her to be caught!'

Jim shook his head. 'I couldn't have got her away,' he said dully. 'You don't know what harm she does. You don't know what harm is. I hate prisons, but Eliza's safe there. She does less mischief there than she could do outside. It's what she's done that's crueller than being caught.'

Viola's heart was still shaken with pity and tears, but she was happier. She could not but be happier—the great ache of separation was over.

She made Jim drink some coffee, and drank it eagerly herself. Then she said,—

'Jim, I'm never going to leave you again!'

'Leave me!' he muttered. 'What do you mean by "leave me"? You can't stay. This is only the beginning of the business. It's bad enough to have you mixed up like this in the start, but the inspector thinks he can keep you out of it.'

'But I'm not going to be kept out of it,' Viola said quietly. 'It isn't any use putting me away. I'm not away any more. I couldn't go back. It was possible, perhaps, before I'd seen what I've seen to-night, but now it will never be possible again.

'I was afraid at first—terribly afraid of Eliza herself, and that feeling in her that she wouldn't mind being cruel to

save herself; and then I tried to help her and forgot all about being afraid. I forgot everything but getting her away. Ah! I know I couldn't!

'But you try all your life, don't you, to save people, and sometimes you do get them away?'

'Sometimes they do get away,' Jim admitted. 'I've been thinking all these months that have seemed like years, while I couldn't speak to you, that I was all wrong. Sharing my life—why, I haven't a life to share! I'm pushed here and there into other people's lives, into causes and committees and sometimes into crimes. I've got just as much life to offer you as if it was a scattered seed a bird carries away and drops anywhere among strange islands.

'Don't think I'm grumbling—I've chosen my life. But you can't choose one thing and take another. And that's what I was trying to do—wanting you.'

'But you do want me?' Viola asked in a low voice.

Jim gave a queer little laugh. 'I want you as much as a hungry man wants bread,' he said, 'but I can do without you better!'

'Well,' said Viola, 'I'm sorry if you can dispense with me so easily — I sacrificed myself once to your pride — I went away to learn—all sorts of different things—and every one of them pulled me back to you.

'I'll never go away again. I'll share your committees and your causes. Where you're blamed I'll be blamed, but I'll not stay any more by myself.

'You say you don't want me to share your life—but look at me, Jim—I am your life.'

An iron bar in Jim's heart gave way suddenly. His shame and his pride gave way, and all his loneliness.

Beauty touched him. It was as if he saw, with a flash of jewelled wings, a Kingfisher fly home.

THE END